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What is the Relationship Between the Degree Middle Schools Implement the Essential Elements, Student Achievement and the Programs and Practices Applied in Each School

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ABSTRACT

By 2003, both the New York State Board of Regents Policy Statement and the new Commissioner's Regulation 100.4, required all middle level programs to implement a set of policies and practices called the NYS Essential Elements of Standards-Focused Middle-Level Schools and Programs. Early adolescence (ages 10-14) is a time when students experience, the most tumultuous physical and mental changes occur during adolescence, with the exception of a child's first year of life (Montessori, 2004). Middle grade level philosophy and a description of what middle schools should be like are directly linked to taking a balanced approach to meeting the social, emotional, intellectual and academic needs of students in the middle grades. Many of these beliefs became the foundation of middle grade level education and they serve as the principles of the NYS Essential Elements.

The New York State Education Department (NYSED) never enforced its own middle grade regulations and has provided little support to help school leaders understand and implement the Essential Elements. Some observers insist that the practices required by the Essential Elements can play a critical role in supporting students' learning, while others treat practices that do not directly address their academic learning as "extras" that only the wealthiest school districts can afford. Recently, public schools in New York State have faced financial difficulties trying to manage many changes to their instructional and evaluative practices. School leaders often struggle to know what decisions to make that will improve the culture within the school and earn higher student achievement ratings on state tests. How would applying the NYS Essential Elements impact the culture in the building and the test scores of its students?

This study compares the ways in which four schools implement the NYS Essential Elements and explores whether and how their implementation of the Elements may have affected three years of student achievement scores on the NYS math and ELA, 8th grade test. Both surveys and follow up interviews were used to collect data to measure the degree each school implemented the NYS Essential Elements. A basic statistical analysis was used to explain the survey data. Interview data was coded to facilitate analysis. The study investigates how and why schools apply the NYS Essential Elements and the impact they may have on the academic and social fabric within each school.

Results of the study indicated that all four schools implemented the NYS Essential Elements to a moderate or above moderate degree. The school that implemented the NYS Essential Element to the greatest degree also had the highest test scores in math and second highest in ELA in spite of having a high percentage of students living in poverty. Another school that had the highest percentage of students living in poverty implemented the Essential Elements to the second highest degree and performed as well on state tests as the school with lower rates of poverty and implementation. The two high need schools in the study performed as well or better than the average need schools. The study provides reasons to believe that applying the NYS Essential Elements can help students overcome the hurdles of poverty and achieve at a higher rate.

This study contributes to the body of literature about middle level philosophy and practices. Four school case studies provide an in depth look at how and why the NYS Essential Elements of Standards Focused Middle Level Schools and Programs benefit middle school students. The study also reveals the importance of taking a balanced approach to middle grade

education, making time to meet the specific needs of students and having school leaders consider the NYS Essential Elements to guide them through difficult decisions.

WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE DEGREE MIDDLE SCHOOLS
IMPLEMENT THE NYS ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS, STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT AND THE
PROGRAMS AND PRACTICES APPLIED IN EACH SCHOOL?

by

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CHAPTER 1 – OVERVIEW OF STUDY

Introduction

Adults often embarrassingly look back on their young adolescent days attending school recalling the awkward memories of their bodies, minds, and emotions dramatically changing. The most tumultuous physical and mental changes occur during adolescence, with the exception of a child's first year of life (Montessori, 2004).

In 1965, when grades 5-8 began to be referred to as middle grades, there has been a distinct philosophy about how to educate these students. Schools need to take a balanced approach by addressing the social, emotional and academic needs of all students. Middle grade students, children between the ages of 10-14, have a variety of needs that require educational programs to take a balanced approach.

The New York State Education Department embraced this belief system and implemented a set of practices that reflected these beliefs. During the mid to late 1980's, the New York State Education Department began to focus on research based practices for the middle grades. This led to the publication of the *New York State Essential Elements of Standards Focused Middle Level Schools and Programs* in 1989. From this point forward, the *NYS Essential Elements of Standards Focused Middle Level Schools and Programs* will be referred to as the NYS Essential Elements.

This case study of four schools in western New York establishes a strong correlation between student achievement, measured by the NYS Tests given to 8th grade students in English language arts and math, and the degree of application of the NYS Essential Elements within these schools. The study also provides an in depth look into how and why each school implemented the NYS Essential Elements.

Dr. Maria Montessori identified four stages of development when she began studying childhood development in 1897. By 1907, Montessori opened her first school and in 1909 published, The Montessori Method. The book described the importance of educating children while using instructional strategies that matched their developmental needs. Her methods were unconventional and enlightening to educators around the world. Montessori schools adapted their instructional programs and practices dependent upon the stage of development of each child. “She felt by working independently children could reach new levels of autonomy and become self-motivated to reach new levels of understanding. Montessori also came to believe that acknowledging all children as individuals and treating them as such would yield better learning and fulfilled potential in each particular child” (Montessori, 2004). Maria found that children pass through certain phases of development, each of which has its own particular needs. The characteristics of each phase can be so different that the passages from one phase to another have been described by certain psychologists as rebirths (Montessori, 2004). This research supports the idea that the needs of middle school students are different from the needs of elementary and high school students. Therefore, the philosophy and programs that serve them must also be different to meet their needs specific to their developmental stage. Stage three is the primary stage for students in grades 5-8.

Using MRI technology, researchers supported the belief that during stage three the pre-frontal cortex experiences more synaptic growth than any other time in life other than the amazing growth experienced from birth to three (Montessori, 2004). The pre-frontal cortex controls planning, working memory, judgment, reasoning, and mood. Students experiencing stage three develop a need to explore the world and engage in purposeful learning. They also place great emphasis on social acceptance while beginning to learn how to cultivate and sustain

relationships with others. Middle grades focus on introducing students to new experiences and situations where they can learn about the social and emotional needs of themselves and others. Teachers find ways to integrate teamwork into academic classes encouraging students solve real life problems in collective groups. School programs designed to foster social and emotional skills; known as advisor/advisee time, home base, or family group time, can take place at the beginning or end of the school day as well as during lunch. These sessions provide students with time to discuss healthy ways to address the real life problems they all face as young adults. Sample topics include, but are not limited to: how to communicate with parents, being a positive leader, how to resolve conflicts with friends, and how to set and achieve life goals. The roots of these and other beliefs that focused on fostering the social and emotional needs of students in conjunction with their academic and intellectual needs were also expressed by William Alexander in the United States during the 1960's.

Beliefs about Educating Students in the Middle Grades

William Alexander, considered by some to be the grandfather of the middle grade philosophy, described the need to replace the junior high philosophy with a middle grade philosophy in his speech at Cornell University in 1963 (NASSP, 2015). William Alexander's middle grade philosophy and his description of what schools need to do to meet the needs of middle school age students relates directly to the needs of students in the middle grades described above by Montessori. Alexander spoke about the importance of schools providing a rich learning environment where students in middle grades could further explore the content, as opposed to following the high school curriculum, which is heavy on memorizing content knowledge and light on exploration. Alexander called for teaming; teachers across core subject

areas teaching the same group of students so they can better meet students' academic and emotional needs (Alexander, 1965).

Middle grade educators familiar with middle school best practices and the research associated with it know the importance of meeting the social, emotional, academic, and intellectual needs of all students to advance student success in school. The middle grade philosophy centers around meeting the varying needs of students and this grew into a belief system that manifested into a series of best practices. This includes, but is not limited to: schools with teacher teams, mentor programs, academic support programs for struggling and enrichment students, programs that promote positive character traits, engaging instructional practices that promote critical thinking and problem solving, exploration of various subject areas, diversified leadership and learning opportunities that involve academics, fine arts, and athletics.

The NYS Essential Elements calls for schools to provide rich learning experiences where students can learn through inquiry and to form teacher teams and better meet the academic and social needs of students. The NYS Essential Elements require schools with middle grades to provide a balanced approach in meeting both the academic, intellectual, social and emotional needs of all students. The New York State Essential Elements are listed below.

Table 1 – *NYS Essential Elements of Standards Based Middle Level Schools and Programs*

- 1.0 A philosophy and mission that reflect the intellectual and developmental needs and characteristics of young adolescents.
- 2.0 An educational program that is comprehensive, challenging, purposeful, integrated, relevant, and standards-based.

3.0 An organization and structure that support both academic excellence and personal development.

4.0 Classroom instruction appropriate to the needs and characteristics of young adolescents provided by skilled and knowledgeable teachers.

5.0 Strong educational leadership and a building administration that encourage, facilitate, and sustain involvement, participation, and partnerships.

6.0 A network of academic and personal support available for all students.

7.0 Professional learning and staff development for all staff that are ongoing, planned, purposeful, and collaboratively developed

Prior to implementing the NYS Essential Elements, it was not common for schools in New York State to provide programs and practices with the specific intention of taking a balanced approach when meeting the needs of students. The NYS Essential Elements require schools to provide ongoing professional development in order to provide an educational program that is purposeful, relevant, differentiated, and standards based. Faculty meetings, staff development days, and team meeting time provide opportunities for professional development to occur. Schools who take advantage of scheduled professional development time are regularly able to provide ongoing, relevant professional development that is both practical and useful for staff members. Having a knowledgeable staff that has the same core beliefs benefits the students by increasing the chances of meeting their varying needs.

In 2003, after years of research, the New York State Board of Regents approved a revised *Policy Statement on Middle-Level Education*. This policy statement identified the seven essential elements (listed above) that must be in place in the middle grades (grades 5-8) if young adolescents are to succeed academically and develop as individuals. In that same year, revisions to part 100.4 of Commissioner's Regulations established a mandate requiring that all middle-

level programs implement the Seven Essential Elements of Standards-Focused Middle-Level Schools and Programs.

Reductions in School Aid - Administrators Make Difficult Choices

However, eleven years after the Commissioner's Regulation and guidance requirements, not all middle level schools have fully implemented the NYS Essential Elements. In fact, many schools in New York find it difficult to maintain the current programs and staffing that provide student centered programs (during and after school) to meet the varying needs of their students. Reductions in State and Federal funding, costly mandates, and local decisions that no longer support the implementation of the NYS Essential Elements cause some districts to implement the Essential Elements required by the Commissioner's Regulation to a lesser degree.

When school administrators need to reduce expenses the most common answer is to cut staff. Schools are a people business; the majority of expenses pay salaries, health insurance, social security, and pension benefits of staff members. Some administrators have been able to make cuts using a scalpel preserving teaming and other after school or counseling programs critical to meeting both the social and emotional needs of students that align with the NYS Essential Elements. Without teaming and other programs addressing their needs, students struggle to achieve their best. Teaming provides the core subject area teacher teams the time and forum to meet regularly to discuss student needs. Among the four schools in the case study, Maple Hill has taken this scalpel approach to preserve programs, such as teaming, while making their budget cuts. The other schools, Oak Hill, Walnut Hill, and Pine Hill cut core subject (math, science, ELA, and social studies) teachers in the middle and high school grades. The cuts made it nearly impossible to schedule common team planning time, which prompted the elimination of teaming at the seventh and eighth grade levels.

Boards of Education, Superintendents, and Principals need to know, and understand, the value of this middle school philosophy that focuses on meeting the diverse needs of students. Knowledge of the NYS Essential Elements will allow them to have a clear understanding of the impact cuts will have on students and therefore make well-informed, research driven decisions in the best interest of the students.

Increasing Student Achievement is a High Priority

Increasing student achievement remains a high priority in New York State. The state's goal for the middle grades is to increase student achievement results on the New York State Grades 3-8 Standardized Exams in English Language Arts (ELA) and math. The most recent educational reform movement also calls for standardized testing to serve as the primary means of measuring the effectiveness of teachers and principals. The New York State Department of Education (NYSED) and the school districts expend substantial financial resources and promote discussion to transform curriculum, teaching practices, and student expectations based on standardized test results in ELA and math. Interestingly enough, there is little to no emphasis by NYSED and some districts to provide a balanced program that meets the objective of the NYS Essential Elements. The following four case studies will provide insight into why a balanced approach to meeting the needs of students is equally important to increasing student achievement as the curriculum and instructional practices.

Case Studies Provide In Depth Look into Schools

Previous studies conducted by Payton and Zsellar (2000), New York State Education Department (2001), Lutz (2004), Jadallah (2005), McGorry (2009), and Williams (2005) have found correlations between the implementation of middle level best practices and increasing student achievement based on different standardized assessments. The four case studies

described in this study are different than these previous studies because they provide an in depth look into each school and share greater insight into the importance of providing a balanced program that meets the needs of students. The study describes how and why each school does or does not implement the NYS Essential Elements and reveals the obstacles these schools face during this difficult time for public education in Western New York. The expectation is that this case study involving four Western New York Schools will attend to the “how” and “why” questions pertaining to the implementation of NYS Middle Level Essential Elements. It will also inform the state and national discussions on educational reform in the middle grades. Survey and interview data from this study allows for a close up look into the perception and knowledge of how staff members feel their schools meet the social, emotional, academic, and intellectual needs of all students.

My Background

The study is structured to challenge my own presuppositions based on my experiences as a middle level educator and administrator. My background and experience as a middle grade educator was helpful when studying and analyzing evidence that revealed how and why each school did or did not apply the NYS Essential Elements of Standards Focused Middle Level Schools and Programs. I have served as a high school and middle school teacher, assistant principal, principal, and Superintendent for a collective twenty-two years. Sixteen of my twenty-two years were spent working with middle school grades. This has helped me become familiar with the programs, practices, and mindsets that align with the NYS Essential Elements. During this time, I also served on and led three evaluation teams that reviewed schools in New York State who applied to become a NYS and National Schools to Watch. The Schools to Watch Program focuses on middle grade best practices centered around four domains: academic

excellence, developmental responsiveness, social equity, and organization. The components of these domains align with the NYS Seven Essential Elements of Standards Based Middle Schools and Programs in a crosswalk rubric found in Appendix O (New York State Education Department, 2014). My practical experience as a middle level practitioner, and evaluator for the Schools to Watch Program, helped me conduct this case study and analyze the degree in which each school implemented the NYS Essential Elements.

Significance of Study

This study is significant because, during a time when schools are looking for ways to increase student achievement, it underscores the importance of implementing the NYS Essential Elements to a high degree and establishes how they influence student achievement. It also describes how and why middle schools can apply the NYS Essential Elements even during difficult financial times. It further supports research that applying the Essential Elements can positively impact student achievement and a student centered culture. In addition, it provides evidence that the NYS Essential Elements “high needs” schools overcome some of the hurdles that poverty presents while supporting students.

It includes an analysis of four case studies that measured the degree to which the schools have implemented the NYS Essential Elements compared to their NYS Grade 8 standardized test scores in ELA and math. The study uses mixed methods by collecting both quantitative and qualitative data from surveys and interviews of middle-level teachers, principals, and counselors. This data has been analyzed in order to provide a rating to share the degree in which the schools have implemented each of the Seven NYS Essential Elements. The data shows how schools have balanced meeting the academic and intellectual needs with the social and emotional needs of all students. The findings have also revealed the degree to which the Seven Essential

Elements have been applied in the school and how they have impacted the level of student achievement within the school.

The study discusses how some administrators have made decisions to preserve programs that support the implementation of the NYS Essential Elements while others have not. It is important for administrators to understand how their decisions to preserve or cut programs have affected their schools. This further supports the need to enforce Commissioner's Regulation 100.4 and require schools to implement the NYS Essential Elements. It also calls to question the need to provide schools with enough funding to further implement the NYS Essential Elements.

Four Case Studies

This study reports on four case studies of four different Western New York schools with middle grades. The four schools participating in the study consist of two schools with high needs and two schools with moderate needs. Initially, the study was to include two schools identified by the NYS School Report Card as having low needs and two schools identified as having high needs. Since there are no schools in the Southern portion of Western New York with low needs, two schools with average needs were studied in their place. Studying these four different schools has allowed me the opportunity to understand better how schools with different socio-economic positioning and different levels of student achievement apply the NYS Essential Elements along with the impact it has on each school. All four schools were willing to further implement middle grade best practices, but three of the four have reduced their implementation of the Elements due to a lack of funding, costly mandates, and/or decisions made at the local level regarding the allocation of available resources. The study analyzes the academic, achievement and cultural differences among the four schools and examines how much the degree

to which the schools have implemented the Essential Elements has on student achievement based on the grade 8 NYS ELA and math tests.

In order to help readers understand some the educational terms there is a table of educational terms and their definitions below.

Table 2: *Educational Terms*

Term	Definition
Board of Cooperative Educational Services BOCES	In 1948 New York State created BOCES as educational organizations who provide groups of school districts, in their respective counties, with programs of shared educational services. In Western New York, districts receive most of their professional development through BOCES services.
Capturing Kids Hearts CKH	Capturing Kids Hearts trains teachers to develop a classroom where trust, respect, and caring relationships flourish. Having a positive learning environment is important to all students.
Low, Average or High Needs School	The New York State Department of Education identifies each school district on the annual report card as having low, average or high needs. The percentage of free and reduced lunch students who attend the school is used as the determining factor.
New York State Middle School Association NYSMSA	NYSMSA, is an association of administrators, teachers and others who act on the belief that all young adolescents are entitled to academically-rich and developmentally-appropriate programs.

No Child Left Behind NCLB	Passed by Congress in 2001 the Federal Law required states to raise standards and test students in English Language Arts and math.
Response to Intervention RTI	This is an approach to academic and behavioral intervention process. It is used in the United States to provide early, systematic assistance to children who are at risk for or already underperforming as compared to appropriate grade- or age-level standards. RTI begins with high quality instruction and universal screening of all children in the general education classroom.

Performance index PI	<p>Performance index is a measurement term used by New York State for grade 3-8 testing in English Language Arts and math.</p> <p>The calculation of the performance index, or PI, is: $PI = [(number\ of\ continuously\ enrolled\ tested\ students\ scoring\ at\ Level\ 1\ On\ Track + Level\ 1\ On\ Track + Level\ 2\ On\ Track + Level\ 2\ On\ Track + Level\ 2\ NOT\ On\ Track + Level\ 3 + Level\ 3 + Level\ 4 + Level\ 4) \div number\ of\ continuously\ enrolled\ tested\ students] \times 100.$</p>
Proficiency Score	Students achieve a score of level 1,2,3, or 4 when they take the NYS English Language Arts or math exams. Students must earn a score that falls within the range of level 3 or 4 to be considered proficient.

CHAPTER 2 – LITERATURE REVIEW

The History of Middle Grade Level Education beginning with Elementary, Junior High and High School

Middle level education developed after the junior high model had limited success in meeting the varying needs of middle level students. Middle Schools and the “Essential Elements” that were associated with them, emerged from the shortcomings of the junior high program. Some elements of the original junior high model have remained and are evident within the middle school model today, while other elements of the junior high program changed dramatically once the middle school concept was applied. William Gruhn and Howard Douglas, both professors at the University of Connecticut, studied and provided a comprehensive model of the junior high school in their book, *The Modern Junior High School*, written in 1956. They argued that there are six functions that any junior highs must perform.

Table 3 - *Six Functions of the Junior High School*

1. Integration
2. Exploration
3. Guidance
4. Differentiation
5. Socialization
6. Articulation

The research of Gruhn and Douglas shows the growth of the junior high model. By the 1950's, educational researchers were calling for the junior high model to focus on exploring different types of subject matters and instructional practices. Students needed guidance to develop the characteristics they would need to mature into successful young adults. Junior high

schools also needed to de-emphasize retention placing a greater focus on support to make changes when students struggled as opposed to taking punitive measures. Other studies and publications from the 1950's emphasized the importance of meeting the social and emotional needs of students as well. Teachers were urged to further differentiate their instruction in order to meet the varying levels of ability amongst the varying individual learners. Researchers also promoted taking an interdisciplinary approach to teaching the curriculum by having students apply content from several subject areas within the same lesson. For the first time, educational researchers were able to recognize and explain the changes that educators at the junior high level needed to make. Gruhn and Douglas (1956) argued that junior high schools began to fail, when they neglected some of these functions and began to exclusively focus on preparing students for high school by becoming mini high schools.

Despite the publication of best practices for middle level students, a clear majority of teachers and administrators working in junior high schools across America continued to follow the model of being a mini high school (Hansen & Hern, 1971 Van Til et al., 1961, Clark & Clark, 1993). Some middle school teachers still believed they needed to be like high school teachers, which too often meant they did not engage or connect with students, and failed to support struggling students. These same teachers often justified their actions by saying; I have to get them ready for high school, so I cannot baby them.

Growing Dissatisfaction with the Junior High Model

Many negative characteristics of junior high schools left researchers and educators wondering if there was a better way to educate students at grade levels 5-8. In the end, the philosophy and actions of junior high educators were too similar to that of their high school

colleagues. Middle level educators began supporting a distinct middle school philosophy, which placed a priority on meeting the social, emotional, academic, and intellectual needs of students.

Educational researchers such as Bossing (1954) described the problem of junior high schools, by calling them mini, senior high schools, whose staff failed at times to meet the social, emotional, academic, and intellectual needs of young adolescents. Even when a junior high school aligned its structure to meet the needs of its students, the actions of the staff often failed to meet the needs of the student. Bossing suggested that teachers be assigned ten minutes of time in the morning to connect and build relationships with students from the time they walked in the door. This time was called homeroom; most teachers, and all students, were assigned to a homeroom. One problem was that some teachers did not use the homeroom time to make connections and build relationships with their students. Instead, the teacher may have taken attendance, written notes out on the board, or graded papers while the students talked quietly. If the teachers took advantage of the opportunity afforded them, homeroom would become a valuable way to connect with, and build positive relationships with their students.

Evidence indicates that educators from Bay City, Michigan understood the importance of meeting the social and emotional needs of students before the emergence of middle schools. In 1950, Bay City added a new component to their curriculum in order to address the unique developmental needs of their students between the ages of 10-14 years old. The school supported the social and emotional needs of their students by forming an advisor / advisee program. Staff and students had the opportunity to forge a close, trusting relationships while fostering a sense of belonging for each student. This was to promote self-esteem and increase each student's understanding of his or her own feelings as well as those of others. Teachers engaged students in character building activities and discussions while getting to know one

another. Students, who forged a positive connection in the school with at least one adult, had a much greater chance of being successful in school (Puttre, 2007).

In the 1960's, junior high schools continued to be criticized for several reasons. Cuban (1992) cited six criticisms levied toward junior high schools during the 1960's. The criticisms listed below further articulate the concerns regarding junior high staff members behaving as though they taught in a mini high school.

Table 4 - *Six Criticisms of Junior High Schools in the 1960's*

1. Departments work in silos separate from each other rejecting collaboration or interdisciplinary study
 2. Curriculum that is too subject centered as opposed to being thought provoking and involving critical thinking
 3. Inadequately trained teachers who do not receive training in college to meet the needs of middle level students
 4. Instruction that is too similar to high school instruction focusing on a lecture approach in which the teacher is the sage on the stage.
 5. Students organized into groups based on ability
 6. Limiting student exploration of learning which stifles motivation and curiosity
- (Cuban, 1992)

Criticisms of the junior high model in the 1960's encouraged educational researchers and practicing educators such as William Alexander to begin studying the education provided to students between the ages of 10-14 years old. Many thought Alexander to be one of the founding fathers of the middle school and middle level education. In my research, I did not find

any middle school studies during the 1950's. However, there were several school studies that described why junior high schools were failing. The birth of the middle school was initially based on not repeating the mistakes previously made by junior high schools.

The Birth of the Middle School and Middle Grade Level Education

In July of 1963 at Cornell University, William Alexander delivered, what is now regarded as the speech that led to the birth of the middle school concept (David, 1998, Puttre, 2007). Cornell University invited Alexander to give the keynote address at a Conference on Junior High. Initially, Alexander was going to call the speech, "The Dynamic Junior High School". However, Alexander could not find many good things to say about the execution of the junior high model. A flight delay gave Alexander time to re-write his speech, and instead of beating up on the existing junior high model, he addressed a few areas of deficiency in the model then focused his speech on describing a new school model called the middle school model.

Alexander called for the establishment of a middle level educational program that would keep certain aspects of the current junior high program and strengthen other aspects of the program to meet the needs of the young adolescents it served. By motivating and encouraging students to work hard and learn at a high rate, they would be ready for the next level. Educators who understood the unique needs of learners at the middle level would work to create a supportive learning environment. They would create a positive, supportive, learning environment that motivated and engaged learners. Many of the aspects of the middle school shared through Alexander's speech became part of the initial "Elements" of the middle level philosophy (David, 1998).

Alexander felt the current junior high program could improve on transitioning students from elementary school to high school. He understood that the junior high school's approach to

the transition, by serving as a junior version of high school, was not successful. Middle schools would need to take a different approach by providing transition programs to bridge the connections between the elementary, middle, and high schools. For example, elementary schools assigned students to a single teacher who provided instruction related to all four of the core subject areas. High schools organized teachers by department according to the subject area they taught, which tended to lead them to working in isolation. The middle level program would place students on teams of two to five teachers. Team teachers would collaborate to provide a rich learning environment with abundant opportunities for students to explore their individual interests while being engaged in the curriculum. Teachers would also receive professional development that supported an interdisciplinary team approach to learning (Hodge, 2010, David, 1998).

Elementary, Middle and High School

Alexander's speech helped promote a level of education positioned between childhood and adolescence (Alexander, 1966). By the mid 1960's, the concept of the middle school was being promoted as an alternative to the failing junior high model (Eichhorn, 1968). While the junior high plan included grades 7, 8, and 9, it was designed to be a mini-high school to prepare students for high school. The middle school plan included a minimum of two or more grades between 5, 6, 7, and 8 designed to meet the social, emotional, academic, and intellectual needs of early adolescents. Education in the middle grades began to represent a new level of education that was separate from both elementary and high school.

Middle school advocates believed the best way to prepare students for high school was to have them develop a love for learning at the middle school level. Recognition as a new, separate level was no small matter; it meant that for many districts, middle grades education would

require its own building in larger districts. Alexander's speech validated the idea that middle school practices needed to be separate and different from elementary and high school. Most importantly, it recognized middle level student needs as being distinct and different from elementary and high school student needs.

The middle school movement in education can be traced from the mid-nineteen sixties to current times. Like many movements, it went through various stages as it evolved over time. There are a number of ways to divide and organize these stages of the middle school movement and I will address each according to the following stages of development.

Developmental Stages of Middle Level Education

1. Emergence of the First Middle School 1963-1972
2. Middle Level Education becomes a National Movement 1973-1982
3. Middle Level Education – Principals and Practices are Further Defined 1983-2000
4. NYS Middle Level Education and the Essential Elements 1980-2015
5. Reforming Middle Level Education 2001-2015

Early Research in Support of the Middle Grade Level Philosophy

Research in support of the new middle school model was limited. The elements had not been extensively employed at this point. During the 1960's to 1970's, it appears that very few, if any, studies were completed that studied the application of the many components of the elements that make up the best practices for middle schools. Even now, there have been only two studies conducted about the NYS Essential Elements and how they affect a school when applied.

In 1963, when William Alexander described the characteristics of middle schools, there were some studies about individual programs and practices that were later incorporated in the

NYS Essential Elements, such as teaming and mentoring, but there were no studies about efforts to apply all of the components of the essential elements collectively. Those studies that did address particular practices did not originally address the process. Efforts to apply all components needed to be followed in order to successfully implement them. Process oriented studies about teaming and mentoring are more recent. There are 43 separate components between all seven NYS Essential Elements. Teaming and mentoring represent two of the forty-three. A practical list is provided in the next section and a complete list can be found in Appendix L.

There is a lack of early research from the 1960 to 1970 about these programs compared to what we know about both of them now from more recent research. This indicates that people like William Alexander created the essential elements for middle schools without a lot of support from research. The initial philosophy emerged in response to the failure of the junior high model rather than as a reflection of research justifying either separate or collective components of the essential elements. In other words, the middle school philosophy of trying to meet the needs of all students came about largely as a result of the failure of the junior high model that expected students to adapt to practices that aligned with the high school.

Emergence of the First Middle School 1963-1972

Following William Alexander's speech at Cornell in 1963, a group of pioneers in middle grade education led the national middle school movement. William Alexander, Conrad Toepfer, John Lounsbury, Donald Eichorn, William Van Til, and Gordon Vars made great contributions to the national middle level reform movement. Reforming education in the middle grades became a grass roots movement that eventually spread across the nation. Thousands of teachers and administrators took courageous stands to establish developmentally responsive middle

schools. Professional organizations, such as the National Middle School Association and the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, helped spread the word on how schools could implement middle level reforms.

By the early 1960's, the junior high model proved that it was not going to be able to meet the needs of adolescents in the middle grades. Ultimately, the lack of quality school programs and student choice put an end to the junior high school model (Goodman, 2006).

In 1961, the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development published, *The Junior High We Need*. In the report, ASCD recommended, following extensive study of the current middle grade practices, that local communities play an integral role in planning for the changes that needed to occur. They recommended professional educators also accept their leadership responsibility by applying the changes that needed to occur in their school. During the same year Van Til, Vars, and Lounsberry published *Modern Education for the Junior High School Years*. The authors provided a detailed negative analysis of the junior high school model and concluded that it failed to fulfill some of its intentions; for example, personalized learning experiences across subject areas.

Subsequently, in 1965, William Alexander and Emmett Williams described the features of what elements should be included in a middle school model. The article, *Schools for the Middle Years* published in 1965 in the Journal Educational Leadership, stressed the importance of meeting the varying academic and social needs of students. Alexander and Williams felt that meeting the needs of students was essential to middle schools design. This became the decision criteria in many middle level schools contrary to the junior high model where administration and teachers often based their decisions on what they thought would best prepare students for high school. They called for a series of reforms to initiate the process.

Middle school teachers needed to increase differentiated learning opportunities along with multiple means for students to be able to demonstrate what they have learned. Middle schools needed to promote the intellectual components of the curriculum by having students question, analyze, reflect, and think critically while learning. Next, they needed to increase the application of basic literacy and mathematical skills across all subject areas. Some characteristics found in junior high schools; for instance, providing exploratory experiences including courses in health and physical education, became part of the middle school concept. Middle schools also needed to teach values throughout the curriculum.

A final recommendation centered on using school personnel in a team configuration and in other ways to properly support the social, emotional, and academic needs of students (Alexander and Williams, 1965). Teaming changed everything. Teaming brought teachers together to not only plan instruction, but to find ways to meet the academic, social, and emotional needs of all students. Teaming, combined with team planning time in the daily schedule, allowed teachers to plan and work together to make sure they met all student needs. Because teachers worked together to meet the varying academic and social needs, fewer students would go without the support they needed to avoid slipping through the cracks.

By 1968, William Alexander published a middle school study titled, *A Survey of Organizational Patterns of Reorganized Middle Schools* along with a book titled, *The Emergent Middle School*. One thousand seven hundred and ninety-eight schools with at least grades 6 and 7 participated in the study. Having at least grades 6 and 7 in the school building was the initial criterion to join the study. As a result of the study, Alexander was able to draw conclusions about what exemplary middle schools looked like. These initial key elements parallel the current New York State Middle School Essential Elements of Standards Based Programs.

Table 5 - *Initial Key Elements of Middle Level Education:*

- Teachers need to provide a good nurturing environment that is caring and supportive
- Staff members are professional and poised for growth and development
- Inter-disciplinary teaming and team planning are reported as being essential to highly successful middle schools
- Parents, family and community members are believed to play vital roles in the success of students in school
- Effective ways to communicate with parents frequently
- Exploratory classes, extra-curricular activities and leadership opportunities allow students with varying interests to be able to connect with the school while exploring their personal interests
- Curriculum and instruction must be relevant, engaging, inter disciplinary, value laden and differentiated when possible in order to meet the diverse needs of learners
- Professional development for staff must be high quality and on-going
- A variety of academic programs to meet a variety of student interests
- Schools need to be evaluated on whether these elements are implemented with validity

Note. From *A Survey of Organizational Patterns of Reorganized Middle Schools* written by Alexander in 1968.

Donald Eichorn, a School Superintendent from Pennsylvania, wrote a book titled, *Middle School* in 1966. Eichorn applied Piaget's theory on development to explain how a school could respond to the social, emotional, academic and intellectual needs of students between the ages of 10-14. He described the phase of development for these ages 10-14 students as "transescence" and explained what schools needed to do to meet the needs of this developmental stage. Schools

with these characteristics were identified as a “middle school”. According to Eichorn, middle schools needed to be different in comparison to both the elementary and high school in order to meet the unique needs of students at the ages of 10-14.

A transescent school setting is a learning atmosphere that provides flexible scheduling to allow for extended learning opportunities, interdisciplinary units, and a balance of traditional core subject areas along with the fine arts, industrial arts, music, health, and physical education where students can take on leadership roles, make connections with adults, and explore interests (Eichorn, 1987). Eichorn was critical of the high school model for being too impersonal, not welcoming, and highly competitive without enough supports to meet the needs of all students. Donald Eichorn felt students required more affirmation, engagement, and personal connections with adults in the building in order to learn best.

The combined ideas of Eichorn and Alexander regarding middle school earn them credit for being the first to describe the characteristics of a middle school. For the first time in the history of schools in America, the social and emotional needs of students ages 10-14 were being discussed to better promote the academic performance of students.

In 1965, only 5% of all middle level schools included grades 6-8 or 5-8, while 67% had grades 7-9 and were called junior high schools. Junior high schools reached their greatest numbers by 1971. They experienced a steady decline in future years. By the year 2000, these percentages were reversed: only 5% of all middle schools contained grades 7 through 9 and were called a junior high while 69 % were 6-8 or 5-8 middle schools (Hough, 1969, Puttre, 2007).

Table 6 - *Percentage and Number of Middle Schools (a combination of grades 5, 6, 7 or 8) in America from 1970 – 2000*

- 1971 – 23% / 1,434

- 1981 – 33% / 4,094
- 1991 – 51% / 6,168
- 2000 - 69% / 9,750

Note. From *A Survey of Organizational Patterns of Reorganized Middle Schools* written by Alexander in 1968.

Middle Grade Level Education becomes a National Movement 1973-1982

By the early 1970's, middle school education had established a national audience. Books and education journals promoted a middle level approach to educating middle grade students. Alexander, Eichorn, and many other middle level educators and researchers were calling for professional development in support of applying middle level practices for teachers and administrators. Middle schools needed a voice to address ongoing research and professional development in order to impact schools and classrooms across the nation.

In 1973, at the Midwest Middle School Association Conference, forty-five members passed the motion to become a national organization. Since forming the National Middle School Association in 1973, the organization committed to serving the developmental and educational needs of middle grade students. Currently, the NMSA is still the only national organization to address only middle school level practices. NMSA has over 30,000 members and they publish two middle level journals, the *Middle School Journal* and *Middle Ground*. They hold an annual conference that averages 10,000 attendees and publish over 100 books a year about various middle level topics (NMSA, 1998).

The National Middle School Association supported the placement of common elements and practices in all schools. In 1982, the National Middle School Association published, *This We Believe*, a position paper that listed the characteristics found in effective middle schools.

Years of experience and research led to the eventual publication of sixteen research-based characteristics of effective middle schools. Focusing on the developmental needs of adolescents in the middle, the paper rationalized the need for middle schools that address middle grade students having unique social, emotional, and academic needs. The sixteen research based characteristics are divided into three areas below.

Table 7 - 16 Common Characteristics of Effective Middle Schools – Taken from We Believe

Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment Characteristics

- Educators value young adolescents and are prepared to teach them
- Students and teachers are engaged in active, purposeful learning
- Curriculum is challenging, exploratory, integrative, and relevant
- Educators use multiple learning and teaching approaches
- Varied and ongoing assessments advance learning as well as measure it
- Leadership and Organization Characteristics
- A shared vision developed by all stakeholders guides every decision
- Leaders are committed to and knowledgeable about this age group, educational research, and best practices
- Leaders demonstrate courage and collaboration
- Ongoing professional development reflects best educational practices
- Organizational structures foster purposeful learning and meaningful relationships
- Culture and Community Characteristics
- The school environment is inviting, safe, inclusive, and supportive of all
- Every student's academic and personal development is guided by an adult advocate

- Comprehensive guidance and support services meet the needs of young adolescents
- Health and wellness are supported in curricula, school-wide programs, and related policies
- The school actively involves families in the education of their children
- The school includes community and business partners

Note. From National Middle School Association. (2010). *Research and resources in support of This We Believe*. Columbus, OH: NMSA.

Publication of the 16 characteristics of successful middle schools, known as *This We Believe*, was extremely important to the middle level movement. They helped schools better understand and apply these characteristics. Many critics of the movement felt the sign in front of the school may have changed from junior high to middle school, but the practices of the teachers and administrators in the building had not changed. The National Middle School Association needed to communicate a set of common characteristics considered essential for successful middle schools around the nation. Now, middle schools had a clear blue print or model for constructing a successful middle school by following these research based characteristics. New York would use these elements as the foundation for its Seven Essential Elements of Standards Based Programs and Schools. This document helped shape how middle level reform would be applied in middle schools across the nation.

This We Believe became synonymous with the National Middle School Association. It became the symbolic face of the Association, and it makes sense that it would change and evolve over time as the philosophy and knowledge of the organization grew. The original version published in 1985, focused primarily on understanding and meeting the developmental needs of individual students. It also provided direction for educators to create a learning environment and

learning activities that were responsive to the inherent differences found amongst middle age students. Educators began to understand better the tumultuous physical and cognitive growth experienced by students between ages 10-15. The elements shared in *This We Believe* served as the foundation of research based practices endorsed by the National Middle School Association.

Teachers were beginning to become aware of the research and middle level literature being shared. The shift in thinking was nothing short of revolutionary. Middle level teachers began to take pride in being able to understand middle age students and meet their many needs. Middle school teachers also rejected the harsh, no tolerance policies and practices from years before. They began to stick up for their kids. They felt students deserved every opportunity to grow into becoming confident, intelligent, skilled, and caring adult who were ready to take on the world.

During this time, educators also began to become more concerned with what would happen to students regardless of the grade configuration. A greater focus was given to adapting school practices to better meet the needs of students. The discussion changed from talking about separating middle grades to implementing middle grade practices that would work for students in grades 5-8 in any school, regardless of the grade configuration. This allowed middle level education to grow and flourish. Any school could implement middle grade practices and “Essential Elements”. It mattered less what grade configurations a school had and became more important to follow middle level practices that were proven to work with students in any school that included grades 5, 6, 7, and 8.

Middle Grade Level Education – Principles and Practices are Further Defined

1986-2000

In 1986, the Carnegie Corporation of New York established the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development. In 1987, the Council established a Task Force on Education of Young Adolescents. Headed by a Superintendent of Schools in Maryland, David Hornbeck, the committee also consisted of leaders in education, research, government, and health. The task force interviewed teachers, principals, health professionals and leaders of community youth organizations. They studied middle age adolescents searching for the best ways to educate young adolescents while at the same time promoting a healthy lifestyle. The report that came from the research, *Turning Points: Preparing American Youth for the 21st Century* was published in 1989. The research further supported previous research largely unrecognized by education leaders in the Federal Government as well as State Government. It emphasized the need for schools to form partnerships with, and have support from, community, government, and other professional organizations to support adolescents and prepare them for success in life. The “Eight Essential Principles to Improving Middle Level Education” further defined middle level education and served as the foundation for the *New York State Seven Essential Elements of Standards Based Middle Schools and Programs*.

Table 8 - *Eight Essential Principles to Improving Middle Level Education*

1. Large middle grades schools are divided into smaller communities for learning.
2. Middle grades schools teach a core of common knowledge to all students.
3. Middle grades schools are organized to ensure success for all students.
4. Teachers and Principals have the major responsibility and the power to make decisions about young adolescents’ schooling.
5. Middle grades schools are staffed by teachers who are experts at teaching young adolescents.

6. Schools promote good health; the education and health of young adolescents are inextricably linked.
7. Families are allied with school staff through mutual respect, trust, and communication.
8. Schools and communities are partners in educating young adolescents.

Note. From Carnegie Corporation Council on Adolescent Development. (1989). *Turning Points: Preparing American youth for the 21st century*. New York: Carnegie Corporation of New York.

Within 10 years of publication, nearly 100,000 copies of the full report and 200,000 copies of the executive summary had been disseminated. It drew highly on middle level expert research and strengthened the research related to middle level practices. In fact, the task force felt middle level schools needed to further implement the educational reforms proposed by many middle level educators. *Turning Points* became the new poster child for what an exemplary middle school looked like after it was published. The Eight Essential Principles to Improving Middle Level Education listed above in table six are interrelated and need to all be applied with validity in order to create a positive, nurturing, and rigorous learning environment that meets the developmental needs of all students. (Carnegie Corporation, 1989)

Turning Points acknowledged the significant gains made by middle schools over the years. Middle schools received credit for doing a better job of meeting the developmental needs of all young adolescents, and for re-structuring schools into teams and smaller learning environments such as “houses” within a school.

Turning Points called for the implementation of the eight principles in high poverty urban and rural communities where they were needed most, but often not found (Balfanz and Mac Iver, 2000). The authors claim this task would be nothing less than heroic, if it could be

accomplished. After all, America was founded under the principle that all men are created equal and everyone has the right to pursue happiness, which often requires an excellent education (Jackson, Davis, 2000). Students living in poverty often have the greatest academic needs and need to develop more social skills than their peers who come from an average income family.

Middle Level Education and the Essential Elements 1980-2014

While the middle level movement was sweeping the nation, middle level educators in New York State were ready to get on board as well. On November 13, 1980, a group of middle level educators from NYS attended the Eighth Annual National Middle School Association Conference in Nashville, Tennessee. Jim Bowen, Middle School Principal of Van Antwerp Middle School, located in Schenectady, posed the question, “anyone here from New York State interested in starting to form our own association?” (Burkhardt, 1990) Eight men and women stood up, went across the hall to another room, circled the chairs, and decided they would need a constitution for a state organization. They began to plan the first New York State Middle School Association Conference. Craig Sherman, Principal of Pittsford Middle School became the first President of the Association. The theme of the first New York State Middle School Conference was titled, Middle Grades; What To Do In '82. One-hundred twenty-five middle grade educators attended the first conference at Farnsworth Middle School.

The annual conference became a place where middle grade practitioners could meet to learn more about middle grade practices and philosophy. Educators in attendance returned to their schools to implement new programs, events, or master schedules that reflected the middle level philosophy. The conference helped spread middle grade practices and strategies. It provided an answer for many teachers who wanted to learn about a way to better meet the needs of their students.

The organization also used publications to promote the philosophy and practices of middle grades across the state. The association added a banquet to honor middle grade educators at the conference in 1983. They next published, a Journal titled, *In Transition*, in 1983. Issues were infrequent and sporadic. A newsletter titled, the *Middle School Messenger* was published in 1985. Two years passed before the organization published a regular newsletter in 1987 (Burkhardt, 1990).

In 1989, the NYS Board of Regents adopted the *Regents Policy Statement on Middle Level Education* and approved Commissioner Regulation 100.4 requiring schools with grades 5-8 to implement middle level reforms. The Regents Policy Statement and Commissioner Regulation required schools to provide both a rigorous academic program and a personal development program for all students. Curriculum taught in the classroom needed to reflect the State's Learning Standards and schools must allow students to explore a variety of subjects deeply while also focusing on reading, writing, and mathematics. The policy also required teaming, team planning, social development, highly qualified teachers and administrators, academic help, and personal support.

For the next ten years *New York's Regents Policy Statement, Essential Elements of Standards Focused Middle Level Schools and Programs*, Carnegie Corporations and Programs such as *Turning Points*, and California's *Caught in the Middle* served as primary references for middle level educators looking to implement middle level reform with validity (www.nysmsa.org, November 27, 2010). In 1989, the Statewide Network of Middle Level Education Liaisons was formed. Liaisons met in Albany a few times a year to advocate for the needs of middle level students. They partnered with the State Education Department to keep the Department informed of middle level issues and solutions.

In 1998, Deputy Commissioner, James Kadamus, urged middle level educators to further their reform efforts by organizing their principles into a set of “Essential Elements”. Together, the New York State Middle School Association, Middle Level Education Liaisons, and the State Education Department wrote and published the *Essential Elements of Standards Focused Middle Level Schools and Programs*. David Payton and Conrad Toepfler made major contributions to the final document accepted by New York State’s Education Department.

What are the NYS Essential Elements?

By 2000, the *Essential Elements* was published. This document became a reference and resource for schools to use to measure the degree to which they applied the Essential Elements using the rating system provided by the New York State Middle School Association. In order to help readers understand the depth of the New York State Essential Elements a list of all seven Elements and 3 components of every Element are listed below.

Each Element is defined along with 3 components. The total number of components is shared to help the reader understand the large scope that is covered by the Elements. A full list of the NYS Essential Elements bulleted list is provided in Appendix M.

Table 9 - *NYS Seven Essential Elements of Standards Focused Middle Level Schools and Programs - Revised in 2003 – Bulleted Document*

Element 1: A philosophy and mission that reflect the intellectual and developmental needs and characteristics of young adolescents (8 components total – 3 are listed below)

- 1.1** Developing the whole child, intellectually and academically, personally and socially, physically, emotionally, and ethically.
- 1.2** Working together to ensure that all students achieve at high levels and, with appropriate guidance and structure, develop independence and responsibility.
- 1.3** Accepting - individually and collectively - responsibility for the educational and personal development of each and every student.

Element 2: An educational program that is comprehensive, challenging, purposeful, integrated, relevant, and standards-based. (15 components total – 3 are listed below)

- 2.1** Emphasizes not only intellectual development but also personal, social, physical, and ethical development.
- 2.2** Is articulated vertically and horizontally, within and across the various curricular areas, learning standards, and grade levels.
- 2.3** Reflects interdependence, emphasizes cross-program connections, and promotes shared responsibility.

Element 3: An organization and structure that support both academic excellence and personal development. (17 components total – 3 are listed below)

- 3.1** Have teacher teams sharing responsibility for the education and personal development of a common group of students.
- 3.2** Have common planning time for those teachers and teacher teams sharing responsibility for a common group of students.
- 3.3** Have schedules with flexible time assignments within blocks of time to encourage interdisciplinary programs and the creative use of time.

Element 4: Classroom instruction appropriate to the needs and characteristics of young adolescents provided by skilled and knowledgeable teachers. (21 components total – 3 are listed below)

- 4.1** Provide instruction that is standards-based, challenging, rigorous, and purposeful.
- 4.2** Know and understand the needs and developmental characteristics of young adolescents.
- 4.3** Have a deep understanding of their subject matter, of different approaches to student learning, and of diverse teaching techniques.

Element 5: Strong educational leadership and a building administration that encourage, facilitate, and sustain involvement, participation, and leadership. (15 components total – 3 are listed below)

- 5.1** Know and understand the needs and developmental characteristics of young adolescents.
- 5.2** Know and understand the essential elements of a standards-focused, high performing middle-level school or middle-level program.
- 5.3** Have an understanding of the subject matter in the middle grades and its interconnections, of different approaches to student learning, and of diverse teaching strategies.

Element 6: A network of academic and personal support available for all students. (8 components total – 3 are listed below)

- 6.1** Respect and caring to engender a feeling of self-worth, self-confidence, and personal efficacy.
- 6.2** Counseling and guidance services to assist students and their families in making life, career, and educational choices.
- 6.3** A process for informing parents, families, and community groups of the essential role they play in ensuring students attend school and access available services, in expanding

and enhancing venues for significant learning, in promoting youth development, and in supporting positive school change.

Element 7: Professional learning and staff development for all staff that is ongoing, planned, purposeful, and collaboratively developed

- 7.1** Know the needs and characteristics of students in the middle grades and the instructional strategies and techniques that work best for these students.
- 7.2** Understand and implement the Regents Policy Statement on Middle-Level Education and the Essential Elements of Standards-Focused Middle-Level Schools and Programs.
- 7.3** Know and understand how to use data to make curricular and instructional decisions to improve students' academic performance and/or enhance personal development.

Note. From <http://www.nysmsa.org/index.cfm>, Retrieved December 1, 2010.

The New York State Essential Elements of Standards Focused Middle School Programs and Schools serves as a comprehensive blueprint for schools to model their practices and programs after. Schools across New York State have used the New York State Essential Elements rubric and rating tool to help middle schools develop improvement plans and identify their areas of strength and weakness for more than 15 years. However, a majority of middle schools do not implement the NYS Essential Elements collectively to a high degree (Craig, 2014).

The History of the NYS Essential Elements

All seven NYS Essential Elements are meant to be implemented with validity in order for the program to meet the social, emotional, academic, and intellectual needs of students. The seven elements serve as a blueprint for schools to implement practices that are research based and effective for the middle grades. Clearly, they were written for adults working with young adolescents. Similar to the most recent edition of *This We Believe*, the focus is on implementing “best practices” of educators and schools as opposed to the initial, *This We Believe*, which focused primarily on identifying and describing the needs of young adolescents. The Essential Elements shaped the philosophy and mission of many middle level programs today. However,

despite the Regents Policy and Commissioner's Regulation 100.4 that mandates the implementation of these Essential Elements, there are still many schools that have not.

In May of 1999, New York State began to test all eighth grade students in mathematics and English language arts. Schools that did not perform well wanted to know what they needed to do differently and schools who did well wanted to know what they needed to do to maintain or increase their student achievement results. The Essential Elements described how each school could increase student achievement by meeting the social, emotional and academic needs of their students. A pamphlet on the Elements was created to be used as a tool to teach and promote the Elements. The essential question asked if applying the Elements really increases student achievement. Dave Payton from the New York State Education Department, and Elaine Zsellar, who worked for a BOCES in Long Island, set out to conduct a preliminary study. The hypotheses focused on the belief that the greater the degree of implementation of the Elements, the higher student achievement results would be on the NYS Intermediate Assessments for middle level schools in English language arts and math (Payton and Zsellar, 2000).

Two groups were included in the study. One sample contained ten schools whose students performed among the best in the state on the state assessment and twelve other schools whose students performed among the worst on the state assessment. A team of experienced middle level educators met with each school in order to measure the degree to which they implemented the NYS Essential Elements. Results confirmed that schools scoring well on state assessments also implemented the NYS Essential Elements to a high degree and those schools who performed poorly on the state assessments implemented the NYS Essential Elements to a lower degree. However, the research also indicated there was a negative correlation between schools with a greater amount of students on free and reduced lunch and lower scores on the

state assessments. More research was needed to validate further the *NYS Essential Elements* and their impact on student achievement. This is one of the purposes of this study.

New York State Middle School Association (NYSMSA)

The New York State Middle School Association became very active in spreading the philosophy behind middle level education. In 2003, the New York State Education Department collaborated with the three middle level groups just mentioned, along with The New York City Forum to Accelerate Middle Level Reform, to revise the 1989 Regents Policy Statement to reflect the most current research. They also ambitiously set out to create a rubric for the Essential Elements, a plan for schools to teach the NYS Essential Elements to middle level educators, a needs assessment, and a plan of improvement that centered on the NYS Essential Elements.

The New York State Middle School Association (NYSMSA) was determined to grow and share the successful programs and accomplishments that schools accomplished when they were aligned with the middle level philosophy. These needed to be further promoted and celebrated. They used both the annual conference that moves around the state and the Middle School Association Journal that is titled, *In Transition* to share ideas with middle level leaders around the state. In addition, by 2002, the Association added the New York State Middle School Association: Middle Level Institute as another opportunity for practitioners to come together and learn about the middle grade philosophy.

National Forum to Accelerate Middle Grades Reform

Around this same time, the National Forum to Accelerate Middle Grades Reform published four components that all middle grades needed to implement. The four areas included academic excellence, developmental responsiveness, social equity, and organization. New York

worked with National Forum's Schools To Watch Recognition Program and in 2004 began participating in the program by evaluating potential Schools To Watch (Craig, 2014). In fact, the New York State Education Department created a crosswalk document that aligned the National Forum's Four Areas of academic excellence, developmental responsiveness, social equity, and organization with the *New York State Seven Essential Elements of Standards Based Middle Level Schools and Programs*. Being able to align the two documents helped middle grade educators in New York State to better understand, apply, and measure the National Forum's Four Areas.

The National Forum created rubrics and other tools to help schools assess the degree in which they implemented each of the four areas. The Schools to Watch Program was designed to recognize good middle grade programs and share their best practices with other middle schools. Currently, nineteen states participate in the Schools To Watch Program. There are twenty-seven Schools to Watch currently located in New York State (Craig, 2014).

Reforming Middle Level Education – Schools to Watch 2001-2014

The National Forum set out to accelerate middle level reform by identifying, evaluating, and recognizing exemplary schools. Dave Payton said, "Having a set of exemplary schools that put research based practices into place allowed the organization to model reforms related to school structure and instruction. Other schools could visit these schools and see it in person. It is one thing to talk about reforms, but it's hollow unless you have exemplary schools that are doing it and getting results." The idea motivated many middle schools and programs to focus on implementing the best practices related to the four areas from the National Forum to a high degree.

By recognizing exemplary schools that applied middle grade reforms to make instruction engaging and motivating, made it more positive and rewarding for schools to apply the reforms

with validity. Increasing student achievement among many students after applying the reforms became compelling proof that the reforms were effective.

In order to become a Schools To Watch, schools must embrace the philosophy of continuous improvement. From the time schools begin to work with the blueprint for becoming a Schools To Watch, they must focus on using the self-study to rate their strengths and weaknesses in an effort to improve upon them. The application also requires each school to develop a plan for the future, and to strengthen specific domains and components. Schools to Watch, focuses on continuous improvement, which is reflected here in the application process. The process of filling out the application requires a committee of staff members to assess the building using a self-study that mirrors the schools to watch components and domains and what they would look like if applied in the school setting. The survey, along with other school data related to student achievement, attendance, student programs, and discipline are used to complete the assessment of the building. This information is used to complete future plans to continue improvement in the coming year. All of this information is used in addition to a personal visit to the school. Three to five team members assess the school based on its ability to implement the components and domains of Schools to Watch. If selected, these schools agree to conduct site visitations and workshops to advance middle level reform while continuously improving and spreading the middle level philosophy of meeting the needs of all students.

Other Studies of Middle Grade Level Best Practices

The NYS Essential Elements consist of a set of seven best practices that support furthering the intellectual development and academic achievement of all students, and the personal and social development of each student. These best practices have been linked to

increasing student achievement. Other recent studies have been conducted regarding Essential Elements and their impact on student achievement.

A study conducted by Payton and Zseller in 2001 concluded that the greater degree a school implements the Essential Elements, the higher the rate of student achievement on New York State's Exams in ELA and math. A direct relationship was found between the degree of implementation of the Elements and the level of student achievement on the State assessments in Grade 8 (Payton & Zseller, 2001).

The study being proposed is similar to the Payton and Zeller study given that it focuses on the New York State Essential Elements and student achievement based on NYS standardized tests. The study is unique in its approach of using four case studies of Western New York Schools using quantitative and qualitative methods to measure the degree of implementation of the Elements and the impact they had on NYS standardized tests in ELA and math. The study hopes to provide a greater in depth look into the culture and practices found within each school based on both survey and interview responses.

Research about Individual Middle Grade Level Best Practices

Early research did not study the application of the essential elements as a collective group. Instead, individual components such as teaming, mentoring, academic intervention services and after school programs were researched. Studies led to mixed results about the effectiveness of these practices due to the fact that many of them did not address the process or procedures followed to implement teaming, mentoring and other individual components from the essential elements. Teaming is mentioned in different NYS Essential Elements but primarily is found under NYS Essential Element Three, which calls for teacher teams to share responsibility for the academic and personal development of a common group of students. Mentoring is

addressed in NYS Essential Element Six, which states that adult mentors will assume responsibility for the development of students. Interdisciplinary curriculum is included in NYS Essential Element Four, teachers are expected to use interdisciplinary approaches to help students integrate their studies and meet the learning standards. Providing a successful transition from elementary to middle to high school and from childhood to adolescence is included in NYS Essential Element One. (NYSED, 2004). Early research about each of these four components within the NYS Essential Elements is shared below.

Teaming

Teaming was initially employed by junior high schools in the 1950's when it was used to control larger groups of students as a result of the teacher shortage following World War II (Kurth & Gross, 2015). Two to four teachers would teach the core subject areas of math, science, social studies, and English to the same group of students. During the 1960's William Alexander was thinking about the needs of students between the ages of 10-14 when he proposed having teams in middle school. Alexander described teaching teams as needing to be located in a common area of the building, a common team planning for teachers to meet to plan instruction and discuss students, and have a common schedule, to allow for such planning on a regular basis (Alexander, 1995). It was not until after William Alexander's speech that teams are known to be used to better meet the needs of students. However, it was not uncommon that some school districts felt that by forming teams and changing the sign at the front of the school meant that they had a middle school. Early studies indicated that teaming had no significant impact on student achievement compared to the traditional practice of relying on different individual teachers to teach math, science, English, and social studies (Zweibelson, Bahnmuller, and Lyman, 1965, Gamsky, 1970).

During the 1980's, 1990's and 2000's, researchers began to study the process that was needed for teams to be successful. They realized that by applying teaming the way Alexander described it by meeting to plan instruction, having a set of classrooms in close proximity to each other along with a set of beliefs and principles that could be defined by blueprints such as the NYS Essential Elements, teaming did have an impact on student achievement (Payton & Zseller, 2001, Craig, 2014). Educators discovered it was not enough to simply change the configuration of the instructors in the school for teaming to be successful. In order for teams to be effective they needed to change their philosophy, practices and procedures to align with the essential elements.

Mentoring Programs

A longitudinal study of 220 students found that students with mentors completed more years of education for both boys and girls. On average, males with mentors remained in school until the age of 17.8 as compared to students without mentors who completed 15.8 years. Females with mentors completed school up until 18.1 years as compared to women without mentors who completed 14.9 years of age (Thompson & Kelly-Vance, 2001). Studies over the past fifteen years have shown that youth need to develop a positive, trusting relationship with their mentor for more than one year before mentoring has any impact on self-esteem, happiness and satisfaction (Lee and Crammond, 1999, Herrera, 2004).

Mentoring, like teaming, is unlikely to be useful if it is not implemented carefully. Recent studies have sought to identify the key characteristics of successful mentor programs. Successful mentoring programs are becoming less about serving as a single intervention program for certain risk areas such as dropouts, youth violence and pregnancy and more about becoming a youth development program. Youth development programs consider the needs of all children.

Their needs include safe places, activities, mental and physical health, a relationship with a caring adult and opportunities to serve their community (Johnson, 2006, Lampley & Johnsons, 2010).

More than 1,000 children participated in a California study conducted by the California Research Bureau which found that mentor programs that were most likely to have positive effects if they followed a comprehensive approach by having the following in place: a long range plan, recruiting plans, a process to monitor mentors, orient and train both mentors and mentees, check eligibility of and screen mentors, strategies to match mentors with mentees, support and recognition, did produce positive results. Those being mentored were less likely to try alcohol or drugs, less likely to act violently and less likely to skip school. These same students felt more comfortable in school and they earned modest gains in their grade point averages (Foster, 2001). Mentor programs make up one of 43 components and they are central to the NYS Essential Elements. They must be carefully implemented on many different levels to obtain positive results.

Interdisciplinary Instruction

Since the 1920's, educators have combined two or more disciplines with each other calling it "core" (Vars, 1991) During the late fifties, Bloom suggested educators follow an integrated curriculum that allowed students to explore the content while solving real life problems (Bloom, 1958). It is not uncommon for middle school teams to participate in interdisciplinary instructional activities. Today, many educators understand that learning is not just a collection of facts, it is based on the restructuring of the learner's cognitive structure about what they are learning. When learners learn they cross subject areas without thinking about it (Marzano, 1991).

St. Claire and Hough (1992) completed a study that focused on a review of both the popular and research literature on interdisciplinary teaching and learning at the middle grade level. It revealed little empirical evidence that student achievement increased in spite of educators in the field sharing that it positively impacted the learning experience. It is difficult to separate interdisciplinary learning from the many other variables that impact student achievement. Interdisciplinary instruction has been found to provide opportunities to motivate students, increase their depth of understanding of the subject matter, develop positive relationships with their peers, increase interest in the subject matter and positively impact a student's social skills. But, research indicates there is limited evidence that these objectives are achieved simply because students engage in interdisciplinary projects (St. Claire & Hough, 1992).

Research related to interdisciplinary teaching and learning has many limitations. No two teachers will teach alike, bias can creep in when schools want the evidence to be positive and there are many variables that have to be considered when measuring student achievement or climate and culture. However, increasing attendance rates and fewer disciplinary referrals have provided concrete evidence that students usually enjoy interdisciplinary teaching and learning (Vars, 1995, Irvin, 1997). While it is difficult to isolate interdisciplinary teaching to know if it increases student achievement, Vars concluded that students learning from interdisciplinary teaching did not perform worse than students learning through conventional teaching methods (Vars, 1995).

Research on interdisciplinary teaching is limited because the researchers cannot control the many other variables such as climate, culture, and teacher knowledge. However, the NYS Essential Elements help guide educators to address all of these areas within their 43 components.

There is some indirect evidence, therefore, that interdisciplinary teaching is similar to other components: it is more likely to be effective when applied carefully and collectively along with the other essential elements. This is further support that schools need to consider applying all of the essential elements in a collective manner.

Transitioning from School to School

Paying attention to how students transition from one school to another began with the junior high in the 1920's and continued into the 1960's with the development of the middle school (Gordon, 2011). How schools and students handle the transition from one grade level to another has an impact on whether or not the student will be successful at the next grade level. School transitions are key turning points in a person's life and successful transition programs have been known to reduce the dropout rate among students (Rumberger, 1987).

A study about North Carolina middle schools (Allen, 2011) addresses the transition between middle and high school. A multi-case study consisting of three school districts used interviews, observations and documents to better understand the transition process for each school. The study found that school systems who found overall success with transitions were also dedicated to personally developing all students, building positive, caring relationships with students and using engaging instructional practices that motivated students to learn. Successfully transitioning students from school to school is listed as a component under NYS Essential Element 1 and is titled, Philosophy and Mission (NYSED, 2004). However, this study supports the belief that the essential elements need to be applied collectively to achieve the best results and that the elements overlap each other often. The study found that schools taking a balanced approach to applying middle level best practices collectively, were the most successful transitioning their students from 8th to 9th grade (Allen, 2011).

Comprehensive transition programs focus on meeting the needs of students that arise as a result of the transition. These can be broken down into three categories of change: procedural change, social change and academic change. If one of these areas is not going well it is likely to impact the other two. Schools can take many proactive measures to help students understand the changes and expectations of high school through a comprehensive transition program.

Transition programs can address the procedural changes by providing a map and bell schedule for students in advance and have them practice passing from class to class during orientation. Social changes could be addressed by sharing the different student activities students can join during orientation. Academic changes can be addressed by having teachers keep models of high school work to show students what expectations they need to meet and then provide the proper supports to help students be successful. Perhaps the best way to address the transition needs of students is to form a panel of current students and have them answer questions by new students to help ease their fears and let them know they are not alone (Ellerbrock, 2012). Effective transition programs will take a comprehensive, balanced approach to addressing the transitional needs of students and they will support increased student success, higher graduation rates and fewer failing students (Epstein, 1995).

Researching the Essential Elements Collectively

My study is one of only a few studies to investigate how the essential elements could impact both the culture of a school and student achievement. George and Shewey (1994) concur that there was very little research about implementing middle school best practices during the 1960's and 1970's. Of the few studies completed many of these compared middle schools to junior high schools. Historically, middle school studies seldom studied specific programmatic factors and assumed differences based on school title or grade organization would lead to a

different philosophy and approach to education. However, these studies produced inconclusive and disappointing results because the philosophy and practices remained the same even though the title on the sign read middle school. More current studies use process measures to understand the implementation of the essential elements by various schools and what, if any, impact they had on the school, staff and students (MacIver, 1990, George and Shewey, 1994).

It is important that studies are being done to understand what occurs when a school implements the essential elements as a collective group. Many middle schools are in “arrested development”, where the middle school concept has not been completely implemented or where it once was implemented it has now grown old and become static (McEwin, Dickinson and Jenkins, 1996). Other middle schools have no identifiable aspects of being a middle school other than the name on the school sign that says middle school while others have implemented all of the middle school elements (Dickinson, 2001). One of the primary purposes for my study is to further update the literature about what occurs in schools when the NYS Essential Elements are implemented collectively with careful consideration of their interrelationship. Currently, only two other studies (Payton, 2001 and Craig, 2014) have provided research about the collective application of the NYS Essential Elements.

A Study about the Impact Turning Points has on Student Achievement

Student achievement has served as a way to measure several educational reform movements. In 2000, *Turning Points*, shared what exemplary education in the middle grades looked like. *Turning Points* along with *This We Believe* became the most widely used document to explain how to create a successful middle school that meets the developmental needs of all students.

Tracing the history of middle schools from the years 1965-2000, many middle schools went from being known as tough schools to work in to great schools where teachers wanted to be assigned. Schools where students were once discourteous and insubordinate became schools where students were respectful and teachers enjoyed being around them. Teachers would do anything to help their students succeed and in turn, students would do anything for their teachers. The transition affected the thinking of school administration as well. Middle schools went from being a dumping station for high school teachers who were not cutting it anymore to a school that hired “middle school people”. The term “middle school person” refers to someone who connects extremely well with students and enjoys being around their abundant energy and quirkiness that is common amongst adolescents. Middle school people work tirelessly to meet all students’ needs, often giving their own time and money to support their students. Middle school people are also good teammates and people who like to have fun and are extremely passionate about helping kids find success in life.

In 1997, Robert Felner led a study to learn more about what happens to middle schools that have implemented the principles of the essential elements to a high degree versus a low degree or not at all. The study concluded that schools who implement the essential elements with fidelity to a high degree experienced an increase in student achievement in math, language, and reading. Felner also found student discipline incidents decreased as the principles of *Turning Points* were implemented with greater fidelity. Similar results were found in a study of twenty-six Massachusetts schools in the state’s Middle Grade Systematic Change Network. The schools agreed to participate in a process of educational reform using the essential elements as a guide. This research is a significant finding that supports mandating middle level reforms (Felner, 1997).

The essential elements emphasized the importance of considering local context when implementing these reforms. The organization encouraged schools to use multiple paths to achieve the vision of fully implementing the principles identified in *Turning Points*. The Network discovered schools implemented the reforms to a greater degree when they had a support system of experts and other schools to provide intensive, on-site, support. This led to the formation of Regional Centers that were designed to provide technical assistance, professional development, and other supports specific to the local needs found within each school district.

Several schools made significant gains on their state assessments after fully implementing the essential elements reform model (Felner, 1997). Educational researchers further refined the characteristics of academically successful middle schools. Below, Puttre (2007) shares common characteristics for academically successful schools. The first two characteristics focus on collaboration. The third focuses on knowing and meeting the individual needs of every student. The fourth characteristic focuses on using data when making instructional decisions.

Table 10 - *Common Characteristics Found in Successful Schools*

1. Shared leadership to support improvements in instruction and curriculum
2. Teacher collaboration to support improved teaching and learning
3. Personalized instruction to help teachers get to know students well
4. Using data to inform decisions

Note. From Puttre, C. (2007). Does the degree of implementation of the components of the middle school design relate to high stakes assessment scores in grade 8 reading and math?

Recent Studies about Middle Grade Level Best Practices

Recent studies include Randal Lutz's study of middle schools in Pennsylvania (Lutz, 2004). Randal studied schools in Pennsylvania that are recognized for implementing the essential elements of middle schools to a high degree. Data was collected from a variety of sources including a review of school programs, PSSA testing data analysis, and interviews at each school consisting of both the principal and a math teacher from each grade level (6,7, and 8). Keep in mind these schools had experienced past success. However, each school had begun to implement academic changes to further increase student achievement on standardized tests. Strategies to increase test scores varied among schools, however, in all cases, elements of the middle school began to vanish once these changes were applied.

Lutz found that schools facing the pressure of not making their student achievement goal as measured by standardized state testing began to abandon their middle school principles in favor of activities that they believed would result in higher test scores. He concluded that the three middle schools located in Western Pennsylvania, implemented the research-based middle grade practices increased student achievement when faced with the possibility of facing consequences due to not making their goal regarding state test assessments. However, Lutz also believed that pressure to achieve the high test scores actually contributed to middle schools abandoning the middle level philosophy. Schools selected to participate had previously been recognized as Eichorn schools. They achieved the honor due to implementing the National Middle School Essential Elements to a high degree. Lutz's study only focuses on three schools which serves as a limitation. The conclusion supports the idea that schools may stop focusing on collectively applying the essential elements if they are faced with pressure to increase test scores. One brief example of this would be to eliminate a schools advisor/advisee program in favor of more instructional time for English and math. Educators and leaders need to question whether or

not pressure form high stakes testing under NCLB actually increases or decreases the quality of education schools provide. My own study notes evidence of schools responding differently to these pressures and what might account for their different responses.

In 2005, Nancy Jadallah conducted a study on the relationship between middle school reform and student outcomes. The purpose of the study was to examine middle level reform in one school district and the relationship of reform implementation to student outcomes. A total of 11,785 students were included in the study from the 16 middle schools who participated. Student test scores and grades were analyzed as part of student outcomes and teachers participated in a survey. A survey of teacher teams was used to measure the degree of reform along with a tool that asked teachers to share their understanding of the degree the suggested reforms from the book, *Turning Points* were applied. The research concluded that middle level reforms needed to be implemented as a collective group in order to get them to all work. Implementing a middle grade philosophy resulted in a more supportive learning environment for all students (Jadallah, 2005). One limitation of this study is that it did not look at student outcomes over a period of time which would have better informed the study to review it over time.

Eugene McGorry completed a mixed methods study about a single school with high needs and high student achievement that is located in a rural portion of Northeastern Pennsylvania. Eugene conducted a survey of staff, parents and students about why their school was able to perform well on state standardized tests in spite of their high level of poverty. Data was collected from surveys, interviews and discussions with focus groups. The study concluded that four characteristics were critical to increasing student achievement. The first characteristic was to establish a close, trusting relationship between staff and students. The second was to

provide programs, during and after school, led by advisors who foster a close relationship between staff and students. The third characteristic focused on providing varied instruction to meet the various learning styles of all student learners. The fourth characteristic required that special focus must be given to academic programs to meet individual student academic needs and prepare them for the required state exam. The study concluded that the four characteristics listed above, which are all included in New York State's Essential Elements, had the greatest impact on increasing student achievement measured by standardized tests. (McGorry, 2009) The limitations of the study included the possibility of interviewer bias that could lead interviewees to say what the interviewer wants to hear without the interviewer being aware of the bias. Another limitation shared by the author was the fact that the study did not take into account the many variables that affect student performance beyond what the teacher, principal and school impact.

Judith Williams conducted a study that measured the relationship between academic growth measured by standardized tests and the degree of implementation of key elements of middle level practices. The study was conducted to provide hard evidence to middle level administrators on whether or not middle grade best practices, when applied collectively, had a positive influence on student achievement. One hundred and twenty three middle school principals in North Carolina participated in the Survey of Middle School Implementation Levels. The study discovered that schools implementing the middle level philosophy to a higher degree, experienced significant academic growth in the first year of focused implementation, but did not experience significant growth over the next four years of implementing middle level philosophy and best practices. The study also found the free and reduced lunch rate was inversely proportional to student achievement on the state standardized tests. For all years the study was

conducted it did not show a continual increase in test scores each year, as a result of applying the essential elements to a high degree. The results of the study must be taken cautiously. A limitation of the study was that surveys were completed by only the principal and math teacher when we know there are many more other variables that impact the measurement of the degree the elements were applied and the rate of student achievement (Williams, 2005).

In 2014, Jeff Craig conducted a study of New York State middle schools in which he compared the implementation of the NYS Essential Elements with student achievement on state standardized exams in English and math. Survey data from the 185 participating schools measured the degree of implementation of the NYS Essential Elements as reported by the principal of each school. He found, the NYS Essential Elements when implemented to a high degree attributed to a 10% increase in student achievement. Craig found that socio-economic status attributed for approximately 65% of student achievement on state standardized tests. principals were the only responders to Craig's survey. The principals may or may not have shown bias when sharing the presence of the NYS Essential Elements in their own schools. Data collection was also limited to only a survey and did not include follow up interviews to help clarify the presence of the essential elements within each school. Nevertheless, his research supports middle schools implementing the NYS Essential Elements in order to increase student achievement (Craig, 2014).

The studies above indicated associations between the application of Middle Level Best Practices similar to the NYS Essential Elements and student achievement. There are not as many studies about collectively applying all middle school elements within a school as there are studies about different aspects of the elements such as teaming and other components of the essential elements. My study provides a more in depth look into how the NYS Essential

Elements are applied and why they meet the needs of students. It also compares how four schools specifically apply the NYS Essential Elements to varying degrees and the impact this has on student achievement within each school. This research further informs many middle schools do not apply the essential elements to a high degree

Studies Find Middle Schools Decrease Student Achievement

Over the years, there have been many studies about middle grade level education. Not all of them have been positive. In November of 2011, Schwerdt & West published a study about the harmful effects of middle level schools in Florida. The study concluded that student achievement dropped from the year students transitioned, which was commonly grade 6 or 7 up to grade 10 when students were in high school. The study also concluded that schools with grades K-8 and 9-12 relative to other schools with a K-5, 6-8, and 9-12 grade level configurations, achieved at a significantly higher rate between grades 6-9. The study also included a survey of the principals serving in all participating schools. Survey results indicated that principals of schools, with a middle level configuration beginning at grades 7 or 8, felt the climate in their school was less safe than principals of K-8 schools. This may lead readers to conclude that students who attend middle schools achieve at a lower rate and have to learn in an environment that is less safe in comparison to the environment of a K-8 school.

There were limitations to the study to consider as well. Middle schools participating in the study spent 11 % less per student compared to the K-8 schools. More than 50 percent of the K-8 schools in the study were charter schools, while the schools with middle level grade configurations (example-grades 6-8) consisted of more public schools located in Miami-Dade County than charter schools from the same geographical area. In addition to these weaknesses, the study did not investigate the practices of each school as well. Their philosophy, practices and

programs define middle schools not their grade level configuration. In other words, just because the sign in front of the school reads middle school, it does not mean the school is a true middle school that follows the middle grade philosophy. There was a lack of definitive evidence to suggest why the middle schools performed worse. Therefore, the authors of the study recommended policy makers use caution when taking action based on this data alone.

Jonah Rockoff and Benjamin Lockwood, (2010) conducted a study of students in New York City who attend a middle school with grades 6-8 and compared their behavior and achievement to students who attended a K-8 school. They published a summary of the study in the Fall, 2010 issue of Education Next. Students attending the K-8 school far outperformed students in the middle school on standardized tests in ELA and math. They followed students in their respective schools from grades 3-8, between the years of 1998-1999 to 2007-2008. However, the study did not report on the practices applied by each school to see if they were reflective of the middle level philosophy. Therefore, it does not tell us whether middle school philosophy and practices result in an increase or decrease in student achievement. The authors suggest that a variety of differences between the groups of students, including class size rather than grade configuration, could also be responsible for the differences in student achievement.

The studies above failed to provide insight as to whether or not the middle school philosophy and practices impacted student achievement. In order to understand fully the meaning of the Essential Elements and the best practices associated with the “NYS Elements of Middle Level Education”, one must have a basic understanding of the history behind the first middle school, the development of the middle school philosophy and practices applied in middle schools. The literature review will explore the birth of the middle school concept and how the Essential Elements were developed over the past forty years.

CHAPTER 3 - METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the research procedures used for this study. A description of the research design, population, survey instrument, interview instrument, data collection, and data analyses are included in this chapter.

Research Design

Each case study uses a mixed methods approach by applying both quantitative and qualitative methods to study the data. Four schools were asked to participate in the collective four school case study. The four schools are located in the Southern region of Western New York and they are all located in a rural setting with nearly all Caucasian students. This is typical of the schools located in the Southern region of Western New York. Two of the schools are identified as high needs schools based on levels of student poverty which is determined by the free and reduced lunch rate of each school. Two schools are identified average needs schools. All four schools were selected without any knowledge of the degree in which they implemented the NYS Essential Elements. Survey data was used to begin identifying the degree in which schools applied each of the seven NYS Essential Elements. Interview questions were constructed to fill in any gaps from the survey data. Interview data was sorted to provide evidence for each of the seven NYS Essential Elements.

The NYS Essential Elements Rubric (NYSED, 2004) was used to measure the degree of implementation of several components within each essential element. Survey data and direct quotes from interviewers were carefully analyzed and sorted prior to determining the degree the school implemented each element based on the NYS Essential Elements Rubric. The degree in which schools applied the essential elements was determined prior to knowing what the test scores were for each school over the three year period. This eliminated any chance of rater bias

to have schools with higher test scores could also be the same schools that applied the NYS Essential Elements to a higher degree. Three years of NYS 8th grade math and English Language Arts test data was averaged to determine the achievement of students in each school. In New York State all public schools are mandated to give this standardized exam each year. All schools give the same test to their students and the overall school results are available to the public through the published school report card.

Permission to conduct the case study was obtained from every superintendent first. Next, every principal was contacted and asked for permission to meet with the staff to explain the study, conduct the survey and follow up interviews. All four case studies involve using a common set of survey and interview questions that are asked of all participants. All four principals, a few counselors and all teachers were selected as a result of working with middle school students. The sole criteria for inviting participants, was that they had to be middle grade level teachers, principals or counselors. Staff members volunteered to participate in both the survey and interview separately, and all those who did so were selected. A majority of middle school teachers from each school agreed to participate as well, 5 of 9, 9 of 16, 11 of 18 and 19 of 23.

A comparative case study allows for an in depth review of a single, complex, social phenomenon, across different real life settings. Case studies illuminate a set of decisions that have been made, why they were taken, how they were implemented and with what result (Yin, 2003). This collective case study approach was used to determine the different degrees each school applied the NYS Essential Elements. This provided the opportunity to gather firsthand experience using evidence from both surveys and interviews to gain insight into how and why each school applied the NYS Essential Elements. Some of the survey questions ask staff members to share their perception of their practices as well as the practices of their colleagues.

This data is combined with a wealth of more objective data on whether or not their school had teaming, common team planning, advisor/advisee, after school programs, relevant professional development opportunities and other programs and practices reflecting one or more essential elements. Follow up interviews further enriched the data and closed any gaps that may have appeared following analysis of the survey data. Perception data can be included in a preliminary study such as this. Follow up studies should be conducted in the future.

The research design focused on having participants take part in both a survey and interview. All survey questions are based on previous studies that used surveys to measure the degree of implementation of the NYS Essential Elements of Standards Focused Middle Level Schools and Programs. Payton and Zseller completed a study in 2000 that was designed to measure the degree of implementation of the Essential Elements by the ten highest and lowest performing schools in New York State. A set of 78 questions were answered by two evaluators who visited each school. The questions are aligned with the New York State Essential Elements and they are designed to measure the degree of implementation of the Essential Elements by each school. In 2014, Craig completed a state wide study involving 185 schools. He used a survey that measured the degree each principal believed their school implemented the Essential Elements and some of the questions used in this study were drawn from his study as well. Questions included in this survey were derived from questions that were used previously in both of these previous surveys. The purpose of these questions in all three surveys is to measure the degree the schools implement the NYS Essential Elements.

The design of the study included measuring the application of the NYS Essential Elements for four schools located in the rural, southern end of Western New York. All four schools were small schools. The sample size of participants from all four schools was smaller

than expected, leaving less than desired conditions to draw conclusions based on survey results. As a result, the interviews that followed the survey were necessary to gain the type of in depth insight the case studies required. Both survey and interview results were analyzed and determined to reflect a 1(low), 2 (moderate) or 3 (high degree) of implementation of the NYS Essential Elements based on the measurement tools of previous studies designed by Payton and Zseller (2000) and Craig (2014).

Quantitative Methods

A survey was administered to each of the four participating middle schools. (See Appendix A) The intent, which was achieved, was to have a majority of middle school teachers, principals, and counselors participate from each school. However, the staff sizes were smaller than expected. Sample sizes from each school were 5 of 9, 9 of 16, 11 of 18, and 19 of 23 respectively.

Each question is aligned with one or more of the NYS Essential Elements. (See Appendix B) Individual survey responses for each question were converted into percentages. (See Appendix C) For example, eleven out of nineteen or 58% of respondents said their mission statement references both the personal and academic needs of students. Establishing percentages allowed me to analyze and compare the data across schools. Comparing percentages to percentages is a lot easier than five out of nineteen in comparison to two out of five respondents.

Once percentages were assigned, results were analyzed using basic descriptive statistics to assess each response and assign a rating to each question based on how the staff replied to the question. A basic descriptive analysis of the results of the survey complement the data collected from follow up interviews. Data was collected, sorted and analyzed using rating scales that aligned with the questions used in Payton and Zseller (2000), NYSED (2004), and Craig (2014).

Ratings of low, moderate or a high were assigned to each answer based on rating tools found in the previous three studies mentioned above. Each question on the survey was designed to provide insight into the degree to which the school applied the NYS Essential Elements in a particular area. (See Appendix D) The rating had a range of 1-3, with 3 as a high degree of implementation of the elements, 2 a moderate degree, and 1 a low degree. Finding the mean percentage by school for each question revealed some trends in the data. Chapter 4 breaks down each question by school. A basic descriptive statistical analysis that is based on the NYSED Essential Element Rubric (2004) is used to help determine the rating each school receives for the degree to which they implement the NYS Essential Elements based on the response to every question.

Qualitative Methods

Qualitative methods were needed to better understand all four schools being studied. Interview questions were designed to parallel the survey because they addressed areas of the survey that needed further clarification. They were also sequentially designed to add clarifying data for some questions on the survey where respondents contradicted each other.

Below in Appendix L, is the common set of interview questions, volunteers from each of the four schools answered during interviews. Answers were transcribed and imported into the qualitative software QSR NVivo 10. The software assisted in the application of the broad-brush coding methods. Broad brush coding uses text queries and phrases to sort and organize data making it easier to code. For example, a text search including teaming, common planning, houses, relationships, and mentors can be used to measure NYS Essential Element Three. Once the evidence obtained from the interviews was compiled, each of the interview responses was analyzed. Next, QSR Nvivo was used to conduct text searches that allowed the data to be

separated into smaller chunks by Essential Element. The text searches looked for key words or phrases that served as evidence of a specific Essential Element. Paragraphs of interview data were highlighted and categorized to align with the Seven NYS Essential Elements. This data was analyzed to identify trends as well as gain a greater understanding of the degree that the school implemented each specific NYS Essential Element. Analyzing this data provided insight into how the NYS Essential Elements were applied and what impact they had on staff and students. After identifying key words to describe each of the Seven NYS Essential Elements, those words were used to conduct text searches. Text searches were also conducted to reveal how decreases in state aid have impacted each school along with how the schools met the academic, social, and emotional needs of all students. After analyzing the collection of evidence, each school received a rating of 1, 2 or 3 depending on what degree the school implemented that particular NYS Essential Element of Middle Level Schools. The rating scale key is 1-3. 1 = the school implemented the NYS Essential Element to a low degree, 2 = the school implemented the NYS Essential Element to a moderate degree, and 3 = the school implemented the NYS Essential Element to a high degree. The rating scale is based on the NYS Essential Elements Rubric (2004), which was designed to assess the degree middle schools implemented the NYS Essential Elements. Level 1 for the New York State Education rubric is aligned with level 1 on my scale which means the school implemented the Essential Elements to a low degree. Levels 2 and 3 are aligned with level 2 on my scale for implementing the Elements to a moderate degree. Level 4 on the rubric is equivalent to level 3 on my rubric for implementing the Elements to a high degree.

The qualitative software, NVivo 10, was used to code the responses of interviewees. Text search queries were applied to organize the information and then code all relevant answers

sorting them into separate nodes representing evidence shared about each of the seven elements. In addition, key topics were coded. Topics included finances, meeting the social and emotional needs of students, and meeting the academic needs of students for all four schools.

Selection of Survey Questions

The seventeen questions in the survey were already vetted from previous surveys used in studies that also measured the degree of implementation of the NYS Essential Elements, based on questions used in studies by Payton and Zsellar (2000), and Craig (2014). Survey questions were used to collect evidence about the degree of implementation of the NYS Essential Elements. Questions were selected if they aligned with and provided evidence about one of the Seven Essential Elements. A consistent set of interview questions were designed to collect evidence regarding the degree each school implemented the Essential Elements. Questions were designed to further clarify and inform the researcher about various aspects of the Essential Elements. Middle grade administrators, counselors, and teachers took part in the survey. At least 50% of the middle level core teachers in each building participated. All four schools had several staff members who were open to meeting with me and sharing information about their school.

The study also included structured interviews of volunteers from the middle school staff from all four schools. The questions were designed to help reveal more in depth information about each school as well as clarify details such as whether or not the school had teaming, common planning, and other characteristics that help describe the school, its programs, practices, and culture. The questions were based on the survey results with the principal and a few other volunteer staff members. To allow for valid comparisons, all four schools responded to the same set of interview questions. The goal was to gain a greater understanding and learn more information about the relationship between the degree to which the NYS Essential Elements are

implemented and the impact, if any, this has on student achievement based on the 8th grade New York State ELA and math tests for each school.

Data Analysis of Survey and Interview Questions

Using data from both the survey and interview each school received a rating of 1 (low), 2 (moderate), or 3 (high) based on the degree in which they implement the NYS Essential Elements. The survey rating is based on a comprehensive, basic statistical analysis of all seventeen questions. There are several parts to most questions. Converting the answers to each question from raw numbers to percentages allows for a basic statistical analysis and comparison of each school. The tables in this section, provide a summary of all survey results sorted by question and NYS Essential Element. Summaries provide insight into the degree in which each school implements the Essential Elements. Each question is aligned with the primary Essential Element it measures with the understanding that the Elements do overlap in some areas. At the end of the analysis, each school was provided with a rating of 1, 2 or 3. The rating scale begins with a rating of 1, indicating a low degree of implementation of the Elements, a rating of 2 indicates a moderate degree of implementation of the Elements and rating of 3 signifies a high degree of implementation of the Elements. This summary analysis and rating for each question provided a clearer picture and more accurate depiction of the data, given the small sample size and significant statistical changes that occur when just a few respondents answer in any particular way.

In addition to a summary of the survey, there is also a summary analysis of each NYS Essential Element based on evidence gathered during interviews. Text and key topic searches were conducted to collect data related to finance and money, meeting the social needs of students, and the application of new, more rigorous standards in education within each school.

The results of the text searches were analyzed and recorded. Following the analysis, each school was again assigned a rating of 1 (low), 2 (moderate), or 3 (high).

The NYS Essential Elements Rubric was used to measure the degree of implementation of the Essential Elements contributed to analysis of the answers. In 2004, NYSED published their own rubric that schools could use to measure and self-assess the degree they implement the NYS Essential Elements. Rubrics used to measure whether the degree of implementation of the Essential Elements was applied to a low, moderate or high degree were used in similar studies by Payton and Zseller in 2000, NYSED in 2004 and Craig in 2014. The rubrics used 3-7 different categories to rate the degree the school implemented the Essential Elements. Categories from various rubrics used to categorize data were grounded to represent three categories- low, moderate and a high degree of implementation of the Essential Elements. There were enough distinctions between rubric categories to divide and ground them into the three categories used for this case study. Having applied and measured the degree several other schools applied the Essential Elements as both a principal and NYS Schools To Watch lead evaluator, prepared me to do this job well.

Table 11 - *Interview Questions Aligned with the NYS Essential Elements*

Evidence related to each element may be found within the answer shared. There are many overlaps due to the general nature of the questions.

Element	Description	Questions with Evidence of Elements
1	Philosophy and Mission	1a,1b,2,4,6
2	Educational Program	1a,1b,3,6
3	Organization and Structure	4

4	Classroom Instruction	1a,1b,3
5	Educational Leadership	1a,1b,
6	Network of Academic/Personal Support	2, 5
7	Professional Training/Staff Development	1a,1b

Interview Questions

1. In what ways does the school focus on the social and emotional needs of students? Ex. staff development, Rachel's Challenge – mentoring program for students
 - a. 1b. In what ways does your school focus on academic needs of students? Ex. staff development, module training, AIS Program
2. When students transition from elementary to middle to high school, are there programs or practices to address the transition between elementary, middle and high school?
3. Has the district focused on curriculum mapping or other curricular work over the years? What professional development opportunities have occurred in the last few years?
4. Are teams set up in the school? Do they have common planning time? Do teams participate in interdisciplinary projects? Do you feel teacher teams do enough to meet the social / emotional and academic needs of students?
5. Talk about parent / teacher conferences – How do they work and how frequently to they occur? Do you feel parents are well informed by the school?
6. What after school programs are available to students?

CHAPTER 4 - RESULTS

This study was designed to measure the degree to which four middle schools in Western New York are implementing NYS's Essential Elements of Middle Level Schools and Programs and the impact this has on student achievement measured by the NYS Grade 8 standardized test scores in ELA and math. Below are six essential questions that were answered by each school participating in the case study. The essential questions provide an overview of each school that will allow the reader to gain an in depth perspective about each school, the degree in which they implement the NYS Essential Elements, how they implement the NYS Essential Elements, and why they do or do not implement practices that align with the NYS Essential Elements. This chapter will also discuss the hurdles schools have to overcome to implement the Essential Elements and the relationship between the implementation of the NYS Essential Elements and student achievement.

Research Questions

1. What are the demographics for each school?
2. How are the middle school grades organized? Is the organization configured to support a high degree of implementation of the NYS Essential Elements?
3. To what degree do the schools implement the NYS Essential Elements based on both the survey and interview results? How do the survey and interview measures compare to each other? Why do or don't schools implement best practices that align with the NYS Essential Elements?
4. How does the school balance meeting the social, emotional, academic and intellectual needs of all students?

5. What are the obstacles schools faced when schools try to implement the NYS Essential Elements? What can be done to overcome these hurdles?
6. What is the relationship between the degree of implementation of the NYS Essential Elements and student achievement?

Maple Hill Overview

1. What are the demographics of Maple Hill School?

Maple Hill is a rural school located in the Southern Tier of Western New York. Maple Hill has between 850-950 students and they graduate around sixty to seventy students per class. The free and reduced lunch rate is between 40-50%, making them a high needs district. The suspension rate was between 3-5%, attendance rate between 95-98% and the percentage of students with special needs per class is around 10-15%. The Principal had approximately two years of experience. Using a scale of 1-3 to rate the knowledge of the middle grade philosophy, with 1 being below moderate, 2 being moderate and 3 being above moderate, both the Principal and the staff rate their own knowledge of middle grade philosophy as a 2. The school has worked on implementing the NYS Essential Elements for many years. Staff members have attended conferences and workshops and have several members who have facilitated workshops on middle level education. Maple Hill believes in using the NYS Essential Elements to help meet the needs of students. During the interviews, it was apparent that they knew about the NYS Essential Elements and how to apply them.

There are a few details to make note of when reviewing the data for Maple Hill. The free and reduced lunch percentage is rather large, nearly one in two students qualify. Poverty is often an indicator that at least some of the students' needs are not being met outside of school. Educators must often go above and beyond to meet these unique and sometimes extreme needs,

prior to being able to educate the student. Schools like Maple Hill, who implement the NYS Essential Elements to a high degree, assist many of these students by helping them find academic, emotional, and behavioral success in spite of not having all of their needs met at home. Some of these results show in the data. For example, Maple Hill has a low suspension rate and a high attendance rate.

2. How are the middle grades organized at Maple Hill? Is the organization configured to support a high degree of implementation of the NYS Essential Elements?

Middle level grades at Maple Hill are in a building that houses students in grades 6-12. One Principal is assigned to grades 6-8 and middle grade core classes are located in close proximity to each other to make it easier for students to travel between classes and to promote informal communication between team teachers. Having classes together also allows the grade levels to establish their own community within their area of the building. This helps students to feel safe and comfortable. It is also important that the school retains a dedicated Middle School Principal and School Counselor to monitor and ensure the needs of students are being met. The interview revealed both the Principal and Counselor were well versed in the NYS Essential Elements and Middle Grade Philosophy. Having these positions focus solely on middle level grades helps ensure middle grade students are not an after-thought in comparison to their high school age peers who often gain more attention than their middle grade peers when it comes to athletics, performing arts, and academic clubs. One of the problems with the junior high was that middle grade students felt they were being overshadowed by both elementary and high school.

According to the survey, Maple Hill respondents show strong results regarding interdisciplinary team practices with 89% replying that teams almost always use agendas for

their meetings and 78% replying they almost always have common planning. Many respondents feel the teams address different areas either almost all of the time or more than half the time. For example, 78% feel they focus on curriculum and instruction while also planning special events for their students. Another 89% feel their teams focus on student behavior as well as meeting their social and emotional needs. Also 44% of respondents feel the teams coordinate curricula less than half the time.

A majority of the staff believe the after school program is not well attended by students. When asked about formal or informal after school programs or extra help, more than half the staff believes that only a few students attend, or that the program does not exist. Maple Hill's after school program does not appear to be well attended. After school programs provide schools with another opportunity to meet the varying needs of students.

Seven of ten respondents replied on the survey that their school has interdisciplinary teams. Interviews revealed that team meetings occur every other day for grades 6-8 and that they all have common planning time. The teams, not a counselor or building principal, run the meetings. Teachers generate the agenda and everyone has input on what is going to be covered. Agenda items include students concerns to new student activities. Maple Hill has three of seven staff members, or 43%, who said they meet three times a week and four of seven, or 57%, said they meet two times per week.

Maple Hill rated high for Essential Element Three, an organization and structure that support academic and personal development. Maple Hill also scored high in the series of questions that indicated the presence of strong educational leadership.

Sharing Survey Results

A brief description of each question found in both the survey and interview are shared below. Each question is aligned with the NYS Essential Element for which it collects evidence. There is a brief summary of how participants answered each survey and interview question. This data serves as evidence toward the rating each school receives for each of the Seven NYS Essential Elements. Evidence from both the survey and interview was shared and each school received a final rating that reflects the degree in which each school applied each of the Seven NYS Essential Elements. Subtitles reflect the theme of each NYS Essential Elements and the number of the Element follows.

KEY Example - Maple Hill – Philosophy and Mission (1) (General Description of each Element and Element Number)

- 3. To what degree do the schools implement the NYS Essential Elements based on both the survey and interview results? How do the survey and interview measures compare to each other? Why do or don't schools implement best practices that align with the NYS Essential Elements?**

Maple Hill – Philosophy and Mission (1)

Question 2 in the survey measures Essential Element One, which centers on each school having a philosophy and mission that reflect the intellectual and developmental needs of students. The overwhelming majority of Maple Hill staff replied yes to this question. Maple Hill's mission statement focuses on developing lifelong learners who are independent, involved, and conscientious citizens in a global community. Their vision statement focuses on providing a safe and caring environment that focuses on learning.

Maple Hill meets the social and emotional needs of students through a variety of formal programs including Response To Intervention, which uses multiple sets of data including

diagnostic testing and teacher input to develop instructional and counseling programs that meet the academic and social needs for all students. Maple Hill also has a daily advisory program. The school has advisory groups in place that function as a supportive second family for staff and students. They discuss and share how they are doing on a regular basis and group members can offer helpful advice while also learning how to apply positive character traits in their life. Teachers participate in Capturing Kids Hearts training to learn better how to meet the social and emotional needs of the various students in their classes. In addition to these programs, they also have teams and hold team meetings to discuss the social and emotional needs of students. They try to reward students for doing good things in school and administration is supportive of these efforts.

Maple Hill staff members spoke about their school attending to both the academic and social needs of all students. One teacher remarked, “Our team meets every other day and if there is a kid slipping through the cracks, we talk about it and develop a plan. We also make a concentrated effort to contact parents and keep a contact log.” Teaming, along with RTI, focus on meeting both the academic and social needs of all students. For instance, teams may talk about the importance of studying and doing homework one day, and then discuss the importance of making positive choices in life and how it benefits them the next day. Response to Intervention teams provide the structure for schools to focus on meeting both the academic and social needs of all students. Meetings are regularly scheduled and result in interventions designed to meet the varying needs of students. Maple Hill earned a 3 rating on both the survey and interview for NYS Essential Element One. The school has taken significant steps to meet the social, emotional, academic and intellectual needs of all students. Having RTI, teaming, and common team planning in place allows Maple Hill to address the needs of varying students.

Maple Hill – Educational Program (2)

Question 3 on the survey aligns with and measures NYS Essential Element Two. This element focuses on schools having an educational program that is challenging and standards-based, as well as comprehensive, integrated, and relevant. Question 3 asks respondents how much these characteristics are a focus for their school as a whole. The characteristics include academic, social, ethical, physical, and emotional needs of students. Respondents can choose from an exclusive, primary, or less of a focus for each characteristic.

Just under half of Maple Hill's respondents selected less of a focus for ethical, physical, and emotional characteristics. A majority selected a primary or exclusive focus in these areas. Considering academic and social characteristics, Maple Hill respondents selected having either a primary or exclusive focus indicating that the respondents feel their school provided enough of a focus in these areas.

Question 5 in the survey also aligns with NYS Essential Element Two. The question describes the extent of implementation that a visitor would observe on any given day for each of these qualities. The items listed focus on measuring Element Two and the degree to which the educational program is comprehensive, challenging, purposeful, integrated, relevant, and standards-based.

Maple Hill respondents have mixed feelings about the degree of implementation of Essential Element Two and the eleven qualities listed in question 5. For six of the eleven qualities, more than 50% of respondents feel they are regularly observable most of the time around the school. Of these six, 77% feel it is regularly observable more than

half the time and that the overall program emphasizes not only intellectual development but also personal, social, physical, and ethical development. In other categories; a common set of learning skills, interdisciplinary connections that promote the standards, writing, math, literacy expectations common across subject areas, and a program that is challenging, rigorous and purposeful, 55% of respondents feel they are regularly observable more than half the time. The middle grades build on the foundational knowledge and skills of the elementary grades, and in doing so; prepare students for success in high school.

Maple Hill interviewees also share evidence aligned with NYS Essential Element Two. One respondent mentions, that there has not been any time in the last couple of years to map out the changes to Common Core Curriculum and that teachers need time to do that. Another interviewee mentions that training to assist teachers to implement the Common Core Curriculum has begun. Technology training is ongoing as well. “We always have technology I pad training going on and the district does a great job with that.” Maple Hill earns a rating of 2.7 on the survey and 2 on the interview. Maple Hill has established RTI, provided training, and initiated implementation of the Common Core. This is a time of transition, when it comes to curriculum and instruction, for all schools in New York State due to the recent shifts around the Common Core.

Maple Hill – Organization and Structure (3)

Question 6 asks staff members to rate the extent to which the regular work of the interdisciplinary teams agrees with a list of eight different statements. The eight statements include agenda use for meetings, focus on curriculum and instruction, common strategies and expectations, special events for students, focus on student behavior, the social and emotional

needs of students, coordinated curriculum and assignments, and common planning time opportunities. Question 6 measures Essential Element Three, which focuses on having the organization and structure support for both academic excellence and personal development. Maple Hill respondents gave strong feedback when it came to interdisciplinary team practices. Eight-nine percent, or eight of nine, replied that teams almost always use agendas for their meetings and 78% said they almost always have common planning. Many respondents felt the teams address different topics either almost all of the time or more than half the time. For example, 78% felt they focus on curriculum and instruction and special events for their students. Another 89% said their teams focus on meeting their students' social and emotional needs as well as on student behavior. Also 44%, or four of nine, respondents felt the teams coordinate curricula less than half the time.

Questions 13, 14, and 15 also measure aspects of NYS Essential Element Three. Question 13, asks respondents to rate the extent of student participation in the following programs at school. Programs measured include extracurricular sports for 7th and 8th graders, clubs, informal after school help with teachers, formal after school programs, academic intervention services (AIS), and coordinated service learning opportunities. Maple Hill had only one of eight staff members who felt that more than half the students participate in the modified sports program. Five of eight, or 63%, replied that more than half of the students participate in modified sports. A majority of the staff selected less than half, only a few, or program does not exist for informal after school extra help, formal after school programs, AIS after school, or service learning program. Maple Hill does not have a strong after school program. Question 14 asks interviewees if their school has interdisciplinary teams. This is one of the few yes / no questions in the survey. In spite of this, there is still some variability in the data.

Interdisciplinary teams are essential to schools creating close, supportive environments. They are also critical for schools trying to meet the academic, intellectual, social and emotional needs of students. Seven of ten said their school has interdisciplinary teams. Question 15 continued to pursue information asking how often they met as a team. Maple Hill had seven respondents who answered this question. Three of seven, or 43%, say they meet three times a week and four of seven, or 57%, say they meet two times per week.

Interviews revealed that Maple Hill has grade level teams with team planning. The following are staff member quotes about teaming at Maple Hill. “Yes we have teams, you can always do more, but I go to team meetings, we meet every other day, grades 6-8 all have a time slot, the meetings are not run by a counselor or building principal, a teacher generates the agenda everyone has input on what is going to be covered, from student concerns to student activities.” Another staff member commented, “Yes, common planning time, same preps, some 6-8th grade teams participate in interdisciplinary projects.” Maple Hill earned a 2.3 rating on the survey and a 3 based on the interview. The discrepancy in ratings was primarily due to a lack of consistency in answers provided on the survey by Maple Hill respondents. For example, three teachers replied that teaming does not exist and the majority of teams did not meet daily or met informally during lunch. Interview results revealed that all teams met regularly even if team planning was voluntary. It also revealed that teams worked together to meet the needs of students. A few teachers comment on how their teams function, “my grade level team absolutely meets the needs of kids.” One other teacher shared, “during team meetings, when we have students who are slipping or falling in between cracks, we get the opportunity to talk about them.” “It is good for us to know that different people interact differently with kids. Some teachers reach students when others cannot. Teaming allows us to know that we are not alone in

the world.” Teachers shared a good deal of evidence to indicate the use team time to meet the academic and emotional needs of all students. Teaming is integral to implementing the middle level philosophy.

A different teacher spoke about the advisory program being a means of meeting the varying needs of students by saying, “in the middle school we do advisory, it is about how are you dealing with everything from how is your locker to how is life. We play kick ball, discuss positive character traits, play rummy and talk about dealing with people and school.” Teaming and advisory programs help meet both the academic and emotional needs of students.

Maple Hill has a strong organizational model that includes having a Middle Grade Level Principal and separate, dedicated wings of the building to housing middle grade level classrooms. Teaming is central to everything they do from instruction planning, parent communication, and advisory programs that help meet the emotional needs of students. The after school program and Response to Intervention Program add to a structure that helps meet the academic, social and emotional needs of students. This includes additional instructional support and counseling programs, both during and after school, for students in need. Maple Hill rated strong in this area following the interviews, which revealed in depth evidence into the organization and structure of Maple Hill.

Maple Hill – Classroom Instruction (4)

Question 8 asks staff members to please rate the extent to which a visitor would observe the following instructional strategies on a typical day in their classroom as well as other classrooms within the building. The list of instructional strategies include, whole class instruction, lecture, guided reading groups, inquiry based lab experiences, follow the directions lab experiences, cooperative groups, student to student discussion, literature circle/reading clubs,

tiered assignments, differentiated assignments, student choices, peer tutoring, and reading and/or writing workshops. Question 8 aligns with Essential Element Four, which focuses on providing classroom instruction appropriate to the needs and characteristics of young adolescents provided by skilled and knowledgeable teachers. Element Four measures whether or not the instructional strategy used, meets the needs of the learners in the classroom. The only strategy that 100% of the respondents felt they used more than half the time or almost always is whole class instruction. In the areas of lectures, cooperative groups, student-to-student discussion, and tiered assignments 44% of respondents answered more than half the time or almost always. Overall, a majority of respondents felt they used instructional strategies half the time or greater for six of the fifteen questions.

Question 9 asks Maple Hill respondents to please rate the extent to which they use each of the following approaches on typical assessments: demonstration, document based question, essay and written response, multiple choice, portfolio based assessment, state test practice format, presentation, and project based. This question aligns with Essential Element Four and the use classroom assessments that are instructionally practical indicators of individual student growth and performance not only to monitor each student's progress in meeting the State's learning standards, but also to plan curriculum. Maple Hill has 56% of respondents, or five out of nine, who responded that they almost always use demonstration, 33%, or three of nine, said they almost always assess with essays and written responses, and 22% said they almost always assess using presentation. The data indicates a variety of assessments are used with 44% using the state assessment format to assess students more than half the time and 56% using multiple choice assessments half the time. Maple Hill data indicates they use a wide variety of assessment forms to measure student learning. The most popular is demonstration with 56%

using it almost always and the least popular is portfolio-based assessments with 56% using it less than half the time and another 33% almost never using it to assess students.

Which statement best describes the use of the NYS Learning Standards by the predominance of teachers in your school? Survey question 12 measures the degree schools implement the NYS Learning Standards. New York State's Essential Element Four states that staff need to know and understand each of the State's twenty-eight learning standards. It also states that when and where appropriate, they should reinforce them routinely during regular classroom instruction. Fifty percent, or four out of eight, said all planning begins with the Standards and the other 50% felt teachers make adjustments to their lessons to align them with the Standards.

Staff members had positive comments about the support to learn and grow as instructors. "The district is also really good at staff development. They provide every opportunity to participate and they provide subs outside of those days so teachers can attend. Where they fail is on a lack of follow through. There is an initial training and sometimes that is terminated." When staff development training occurs only once it greatly reduces the likelihood that teachers will implement it in the classroom. Training must be ongoing and provide teachers the opportunity to implement the training, discuss it with others, reflect, revise, and continue the process to ensure that the majority of the teachers successfully incorporate the training they received.

Teachers also commented on how much they have focused on the new NYS Common Core Standards for math and ELA. "We have done a lot of trainings on the Common Core. We have done a lot on how to write an argument, we have done a lot of work with technology that has translated into academic success." "We put out all monthly trainings with BOCES but also

in house opportunities, focus on more ELA and math. We are working on literacy portions of common core that translate into social studies and science classrooms. It has been an extensive list of offerings. We have next year mapped out and this summer we are sending people to module training.” The district offers a wealth of updated trainings mostly provided by Cattaraugus Alleghany BOCES staff members.

Maple Hill has a culture that focuses on meeting the needs of students. One respondent mentioned hiring staff who have the belief that learning is essential to better meeting the needs of students. There is also plenty of professional development around the Common Core. One teacher commented that the district shares, “all monthly trainings with BOCES and in house opportunities that focus more on ELA and math. We moved into literacy portions of common core that translate into social studies and science classrooms. There has been an extensive list of professional development offerings.” Teachers are trained to support students socially and emotionally as well as academically. The organization and structure through teaming, team planning, RTI, mentoring, counseling programs, and AIS all serve as a balanced approach to meeting the academic and emotional needs of all students. Maple Hill earned a 2.3 on the survey in large part because they did not implement enough of a diversity of instructional strategies with enough frequency to warrant a high degree of implementation. During interviews staff members spoke about the rich instructional program they offer and the extensive support to keep it in place, which earned them a rating of 3.

Maple Hill – Educational Leadership (5)

Essential Element Five centers on the skills and characteristics of effective educational leaders. They must possess knowledge and understanding of the unique developmental needs of middle level students and use that knowledge to guide their decision making process. They must

also be able to encourage, facilitate, and sustain participation in professional development involving the Standards and Common Core Curriculum.

In the survey, questions 7 and 16 show insight into the type of leadership that is being provided. Question 7 focuses the extent to which the following four statements describe the teaching staff in all four buildings. The four statements include: teachers are consistently caring and respectful in their interactions with students and adults, teachers have a deep understanding of their subject matter of different approaches to student learning and of diverse teaching techniques, teachers provide instruction that is consistently standards based, challenging, rigorous, and purposeful, and teachers thoroughly know and understand the needs and developmental characteristics of young adolescents. Maple Hill staff members may select from all or almost all of the staff, more than half the staff, approximately half the staff, less than half the staff, none or very few of the staff. The question measures Element Six and the research that asserts that every young adolescent needs access to a system that supports both academic achievement and personal development. Administrative leaders influence the culture and beliefs of their buildings. This question asks teachers about their beliefs and the culture and serves as a reflection on both administration and the teaching staff.

Maple Hill has eight of eight respondents who felt all or almost all and more than half of the teachers have a deep understanding of their subject matter and understand the needs and developmental characteristics of young adolescents. Eight of nine respondents believed almost all or more than half of the teachers are consistently caring and respectful with students and adults and that they provide instruction that is standards based, rigorous, and challenging.

Question 16 asks respondents to describe the extent of academic and personal support available for students. Categories include adults and older youth serve as positive role models,

positive behaviors are recognized and affirmed, respect and caring engender a feeling of self-worth, self-confidence, and personal efficacy among students, and staff, students have opportunities to examine, explore, discuss, and understand the changes associated with early adolescence, counseling and guidance services assist students in making life, career, and educational choices, a network of trained professionals, special programs, and community resources are available to assist those who have extraordinary needs and require additional services, and an adult mentor is available to students either formally through a teacher/student, advisor/advisee program or informally through a school culture of caring in which teachers or other adults assume responsibility for individual students.

The range of selections available to choose from vary between conclusive, extensive, considerable, some evidence, minimal evidence, trace evidence, and no evidence.

Question 16 aligns with Essential Element Five. The question asks respondents to describe the extent of academic and personal support available for students. Maple Hill rated their school very high in these areas. In six of the seven areas, five of eight felt there is conclusive, extensive, or considerable evidence in that area. Eight of eight felt there is conclusive, extensive, or considerable evidence for recognizing positive behaviors. Seven of eight, or 88%, felt there is conclusive, extensive, or considerable evidence that the school respects and cares for the students, which leads to a feeling of self-worth or self-confidence in students. Another six of eight, or 75%, feel there is conclusive, extensive, or considerable evidence that the school provides counseling and guidance services to assist students in making the right choices in life, a network of trained professionals provide resources to assist those with extraordinary needs and that an adult mentor is available to students both formally and informally.

Interviews reveal that administrators and teachers believe in the team concept and that common team time is built into the schedule. Administration is willing to stand their ground to maintain the team concept. “Teaming is invaluable and I will fight tooth and nail to keep it in place if faced with pressure to cut them and save money in return.” BOCES also helps schools provide on going professional development in Western New York. Principals can rely on BOCES experts to provide training and support for teachers on a multitude of topics relieving Principals of that responsibility.

The principal oversees the middle grades in the school. The principal is knowledgeable and aware of the unique needs of middle school students and has introduced programs and professional development to address these needs. The strong culture of teaming reflects the administration’s values. However, Maple Hill administration, similar to other districts, has made the choice to give up common team planning in order to assign junior high teachers to teach senior high classes. Informal team time does occur, but it makes it more difficult for teams to meet. “We don’t have common planning time in place, so we have to find time to meet.” Teams need regularly scheduled common planning time to address the ongoing issues that arise in order to meet the needs of students. It is unfortunate the administration made the decision to eliminate common planning time at some grade levels. The decision to eliminate common team time is the primary reason why administration earns a rating of 2 after reviewing evidence from the interviews. Maple Hill earned a rating of 3 on the survey.

Maple Hill – Network of Academic and Personal Support (6)

Essential Element Six focuses on whether or not a network of academic and personal support is available for all students. To what extent would the staff commit to each statement as a responsibility of your school? Question 4 aligns primarily with

Essential Element Six and the research that concludes adolescents need access to a system that supports both academic achievement and personal development in order to be successful in school. For some children this comes from the home, but others must rely on the school to provide this support.

Maple Hill respondents selected approximately half of the staff are committed to accepting responsibility for the academic and personal development of each student, making connections with students, connecting students to their school, ensuring a safe, trusting learning environment, providing successful transitions, and working together to ensure that all students achieve at a high level. Only 22%, or two, respondents felt that less than half of the staff committed to establishing partnerships with the home.

Survey question number 10 asks respondents from each school to rate how they use each communication strategy with parents and families. The rating scale includes, almost always, more than half the time, half the time, less than half the time, and almost never. The communication strategies include school wide report cards, occasionally written progress reports, regular written progress reports, student led conferences, phone calls home, parent teacher conferences, school wide progress reports, a web based system with home access to student information, and parent team conferences. Question 10 aligns with Essential Element Six because it relates to schools having a process for informing parents, families, and community groups of the essential role they play in ensuring student success. Maple Hill had 77%, or seven out of ten, respondents select almost always for school wide report cards and 44% selected almost always for written progress reports, school wide progress reports, and a web system with home access. Another 44% selected almost never for student led conferences. Overall, a majority, or at

least five of nine respondents, said they felt the school uses one of the nine communication strategies either more than half or almost always in four of the nine categories including, school wide report cards, written progress reports, school wide progress reports, and a web-based system with home access. There is only one of the nine categories, student led conferences, where respondents said they felt the school uses the strategy less than half or almost never.

Question 11 asks respondents to rate their school in the areas of connecting each adolescent with the school in a positive manner, a structure to create close, sustained, relationships, teacher teams that are responsible for a group of students, a school culture of mutual support and collective responsibility for each student, counseling and guidance services, planning collaboratively and providing staff development opportunities, and emphasis of personal development.

The different categories respondents selected from are conclusive evidence, extensive evidence, considerable evidence, some evidence, minimal evidence, trace evidence, and no evidence. Question 11 aligns closest with Essential Element Six emphasizing a network of academic and personal support for all students.

At Maple Hill three in nine respondents selected conclusive evidence of teams taking responsibility for the personal and social development of students. Another 22% felt there is extensive evidence of a school culture that supports the educational and personal development of all students. Maple Hill is the only school that has a majority of staff members who selected considerable, extensive, or conclusive evidence in each of the seven areas. There was one respondent who selected no evidence for six of the seven areas. However, the results are positive and indicate a high degree of implementation for these areas.

Maple Hill has teaming and RTI in place. These programs help identify students in need both academically and socially. Respondents felt parent communication was effective through emails, electronic updates to grades, attendance and discipline, parent newsletters, and parent conferences with teams. There is also a student-to-student mentoring program and advisory program that meets one out of every four days. In addition, the after school program adds another layer of balanced support that enables the school to meet the varying needs of students who attend Maple Hill. The school received a rating of 3 on both the survey and interview for implementing NYS Essential Element Six to a high degree due to the strong evidence shared during interviews.

Maple Hill – Professional Development (7)

Professional learning and staff development often serve as a key indicator of the culture within a school. Staff development needs to be ongoing, planned, purposeful, and collaboratively developed. New York State Essential Element Seven is measured by those characteristics. Question 17 in the survey aligned with NYS Essential Element Seven. There are five categories that include; principals and teachers know the needs and characteristics of middle level students along with instructional strategies that help these students, staff have high expectations for all students, teachers have opportunities to learn about and understand their subject matter, teachers participate in staff development opportunities, the school has taken a proactive approach in providing training in the Common Core. The range of selections available, vary from conclusive, extensive, considerable, some evidence, minimal evidence, trace evidence, and no evidence. The question aligns with Essential Element Seven because they both measure the degree that professional learning and staff development for all staff is ongoing, planned, purposeful, and collaboratively developed.

Maple Hill has six out of eight, seven of eight, or eight of eight staff members who felt there is conclusive, extensive, or considerable evidence that the school provides training so that principals and teachers know the needs and characteristics of middle level students along with instructional strategies that help these students, staff have high expectations for all students, teachers have opportunities to learn about and understand their subject matter, teachers participate in staff development opportunities, and the school has taken a proactive approach in providing training in the Common Core. Maple Hill earns a 3 for a high degree of implementation of Essential Element Seven.

Maple Hill offers ongoing professional development for all teachers through BOCES as well as other district initiatives, such as Capturing Kids Hearts, IPAD Training, and Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports. Staff members felt they received excellent professional development support. Staff members shared that there has been, “ongoing professional development in technology, Common Core, Capturing Kids Hearts and literacy training over the past few years.” A team of staff members also regularly attended the NYS Middle School Association Conference and they have explicitly taught the NYS Essential Elements to the middle grade staff. Trainings support meeting both the emotional and intellectual needs of all students. “The district also provides training in the Summer time and support by administration to try new instructional practices.” Summer trainings allow teachers to plan units and lessons in advance. This helps ensure the implementation of curricular changes into the classroom. Another teacher shared, “the district is also really good at staff development.” Maple Hill earned a rating of 3 as a result of the strong evidence that was shared by staff members. Professional development is ongoing, meaningful, and relevant. Maple Hill has established a culture that

expects staff members to have a growth mind set and their professional development reflects this belief.

In conclusion, a lack of funding has not resulted in a decrease of the degree Maple Hill implements the NYS Essential Elements. Maple Hill is above moderate in meeting the social and emotional needs of their students and provides high quality professional development for all staff. Maple Hill is moderate when it comes to academic rigor, using assessment data to improve instruction, and shifting to the new Common Core Standards.

Overall, the ratings indicate that Maple Hill implements the NYS Essential Elements to an above moderate degree based on the staff interviews. Maple Hill was above the standard deviation for Element Three, an organization and structure that support academic and personal development. Maple Hill also scored high marks in the series of questions that indicated the presence of strong educational leadership. Lastly, Maple Hill scored above the standard deviation for Element Seven, professional learning, planning and staff development are planned, ongoing and collaboratively developed. Maple Hill rated a 3 for having a high degree of implementation of the NYS Essential Elements on nine of the seventeen questions on the survey. (See Table 10 – School Ratings on Survey Questions page 73) The school also rated a 3 for five of the Seven NYS Elements, based on evidence from the survey. Maple Hill implements the NYS Essential Elements to an above moderate and highest degree according to the staff survey.

4. How does Maple Hill balance meeting the social, emotional, academic and intellectual needs' of all students?

Maple Hill staff members felt their teams worked well together to address the varying needs of their students. They meet both informally as needed and they have scheduled meetings two to five times a week depending on the team. Teams who meet less than every day often

meet informally in the hallway a few times a day. Teachers value teaming and understand the importance of having a good team at the middle grade level. A staff member shared the following evidence, “my grade level team absolutely meets the needs of kids, best team ever!” Maple Hill achieved a rating of 3 following interviews. Before the survey, results showed a rating of 2.3.

Maple Hill teachers use a variety of instructional strategies to help students learn and a variety of assessments to measure what they have and have not learned. Lessons are planned with the Learning Standards in mind. Maple Hill scored above the standard deviation when measuring the degree of implementation of Essential Element Four with a rating of 2.3 based on survey question results. NYS Essential Element Five focuses on having knowledgeable, effective and caring leaders. Staff members spoke proudly about having a student-centered culture that begins with administration. NYS Essential Element Six focuses on providing a support system so students can grow both academically and personally. Maple Hill goes above and beyond to recognize positive student behaviors, provide counseling opportunities for those in need, and they provide an advisory program for all students complimented by both formal and informal adult mentors for students. Maple Hill has the RTI process in place and teams notify parents when students are in need. The staff rated itself very high on the survey in regards to having a deep understanding of both their subject matter and middle grade students. They also gave themselves high marks when asked if almost all adults were caring and respectful to students. NYS Essential Element Seven measures whether or not staff development is ongoing, relevant, meaningful, and collaborative. Maple Hill provides a wealth of staff development that promotes a culture of continuous learning. Teachers continue to learn new strategies throughout their careers to meet the ever-changing needs of students. Nearly all staff members felt there

was plenty of staff development offered by the district. Professional staff developers hired by BOCES provide most of the trainings. The staff felt these were meaningful and helpful. Maple Hill staff have attended the New York State Middle School Association Conferences where they have also facilitated workshops.

Maple Hill scored greater than one standard deviation higher than the moderate when it came to measuring the degree of implantation of the NYS Essential Elements Two, Four, and Six. Maple Hill also had a rating of 3 on five of the Seven NYS Essential Elements, which means the school implemented the NYS Essential Element to a high degree when it came to five of the seven NYS Essential Elements, One, Three, Four, Six, and Seven. It was difficult to have a set of common learning skills and common performance expectations because the NYS Common Core had only recently been released, otherwise the school would have received a 3 rating on NYS Essential Element Two. They had strong evidence when it came to teaming, professional development, and educational leadership, but the schedule no longer allowed teams to meet every day across all grade levels. This was a significant factor, based on evidence collected during interviews, for not granting Maple Hill a 3 rating on Element Five.

Maple Hill focused on implementing the NYS Essential Elements to a high degree. They witnessed the success of students over the years as a result of believing in and applying the NYS Essential Elements. The atmosphere in the school was very positive, welcoming, and warm. Administration, counselors, and teachers were all very friendly and spoke passionately about their jobs and helping kids.

5. What are the obstacles Maple Hill faces when trying to implement the NYS Essential Elements? What can be done to overcome these hurdles?

Obstacles faced by Maple Hill when trying to implement the NYS Essential Elements include, a lack of understanding of what the NYS Essential Elements are and how they benefit students. They also include lacking the organizational structure that supports important aspects of implementing the NYS Essential Elements, such as teaming or houses. A lack of funding may also be an obstacle to implementing the NYS Essential Elements. Staff members who do not have the will or desire to go above and beyond to meet the needs of students also serves as a hurdle to implementing the NYS Essential Elements.

Maple Hill had the advantage of having a staff that was very knowledgeable about the NYS Essential Elements. Several staff members had presented and attended the NYS Middle School Association Conference in the past. Maple Hill's structure also included teaming with the middle grades located in one common area of the building. This is important when creating a safe, secure, and supportive environment for middle grade students. Middle school students feel more comfortable when they have their own area within the building as opposed to sharing the space with high school students. Maple Hill also had a designated Principal who oversaw the middle grades only. The Principal was very knowledgeable of the NYS Essential Elements and clearly used them to guide decision-making. Maple Hill not only kept teaming in place in the face of heavy state aid cuts, they also preserved the Middle School Principal position that some districts may cut when faced with financial adversity. Other administrators at the secondary and elementary levels may not have understood the value of teaming and may have made decisions that negatively impact the ability of the school to meet the needs of the students. Throughout the interviews, Maple Hill staff expressed that they were willing to go above and beyond for students. One teacher commented, "My grade level team absolutely goes above and beyond to meet the needs of students, best team ever."

Since 2008, New York State has reduced Maple Hill's State Aid. There is not a lot of evidence from the interviews that state aid cuts have negatively affected them. The Principal was adamant that he understands the importance of teaming and would fight to keep it in place. Many districts in the Western New York area rely heavily on state aid. When aid is cut, it has a disparate impact on the high needs schools that receive a greater percentage of state aid to make up their annual budget. Maple Hill was forced to make difficult decisions as a result. Maple Hill serves as a positive example for making the NYS Essential Elements a priority and for preserving the programs and organizational structure needed to meet the needs of their students. Maple Hill was the only school in the study where a lack of funding did not lead to a decrease in the degree to which Maple Hill implements the Essential Elements of Middle Level Programs. Maple Hill was able to overcome many aspects of the hurdles they faced when trying to implement the NYS Essential Elements.

6. What is the relationship between the degree of implementation of the NYS Essential Elements and student achievement?

From 2010-2012, Maple Hill had 60% of all students scoring at level 3 or 4 on the NYS 8th grade ELA test in comparison to 49% of students in New York State scoring at levels 3 or 4. In math, Maple Hill had 71% of students scoring at level 3 or 4 in comparison to the state moderate of 59% of all students scoring at level 3 or 4 on the NYS 8th grade math test. In both ELA and math Maple Hill's student achievement results exceed the moderate results for NYS. Students who score at level 3 or 4 are considered by the New York State Education Department to be on track to be college and career ready. Comparing Maple Hill's three year percentage average of students scoring at level 3 or 4 in ELA is 60% when the state moderate is 49%. In math, Maple Hill moderates 71% of students scoring at level 3 or 4 when the New York State

moderate is 58%. Maple Hill had the highest degree of implementing the NYS Essential Elements with a respective 2.57 and 2.71 out of three on both the survey and interview. Maple Hill implemented the Elements to above a moderate degree.

Oak Hill Overview

1. What are the demographics for Oak Hill School?

Oak Hill is a rural school district located in the Southern portion of Western New York. The school has between 350-450 students with a graduating class of around 15-25 students per year. Sixty-five percent of the students receive free and reduced lunch qualifying them to be a high needs district. The attendance rate at the school is 94-97% annually and the suspension rate is 1- 3%, which is low for any high school. Middle level grades are located in the K-12 building and there is one principal for grades k-12. The Principal has six years experience. Using a scale of 1-3 to rate the knowledge of middle grade education, with 1 being below moderate, 2 being moderate, and 3 being above moderate, the Principal self-rates knowledge of middle grade philosophy as a 2 and rates the staff's knowledge as a 1.

There are a few points of which to be aware. Oak Hill School has the highest percentage of students with free and reduced lunch. This means the school will struggle to help those students trying to earn a good education overcome poverty's hurdles. The middle grades are part of a K-12 building. Middle grade students can get lost in the shuffle under this configuration if administrators, counselors, and teachers do not look out for them to meet their varying needs. Although in a position of leadership for the entire K-12 building, the Principal did have some knowledge of the NYS Essential Elements. The Oak Hill staff, on the other hand, had very limited knowledge of the NYS Essential Elements when discussed during interviews.

Oak Hill is a small school that truly embraces the role of caring for and looking after their students. Staff felt strongly about both knowing the needs of the students and working to meet those needs. Smaller school populations result in smaller social networks and enable a friendly, more informal atmosphere where teachers and students know each other well and look out for each other (Byrk, 2010). Because their mission and vision statement reflected meeting both the social, emotional and intellectual, academic needs of all students, the Oak Hill staff members all felt strongly that they implemented NYS Essential Element One. In fact, knowing and caring for their students was their greatest strength.

Teachers talked about how well they knew the students and how this helped them to meet the varying needs of all students. Staff members also felt they had an educational program that was rigorous, challenging, purposeful, relevant, and standards based. Oak Hill's Response to Intervention Program is able to measure, monitor, and meet the developmental needs of their students. Oak Hill also trained staff members in Schools Attuned; an instructional program designed to help teachers understand student profiles and use a variety of instructional tools to help their learners overcome their hurdles to learning based on teaching to the manner in which students learn best. On the survey, 80% of respondents said the school had established a common set of learning skills, interdisciplinary connections that promote the NYS Standards, benchmark assessments to monitor student learning, timely and targeted academic intervention services, and an academic program that was rigorous and purposeful. Oak Hill is the only school that achieved a rating of three for NYS Essential Element Two.

2. How are the middle grades organized at Oak Hill? Is the organization configured to support a high degree of implementation of the NYS Essential Elements?

NYS Essential Element Three is based on whether or not a school has the organization and structure in place to meet both the social, emotional, academic and intellectual needs of students. Oak Hill has teams in place across middle grades 5-8. However, most of these teams have no common planning time to allow them to perform as a team; they do not have the time to talk about the social and academic needs of their students. Following cuts that led to middle grade teachers teaching other subjects at the high school level, the teams were split up. Most teams reported that they do not have an agenda for team meetings. In fact, Oak Hill rated below the Standard Deviation in comparison to other schools.

Oak Hill teachers have been trained to use a variety of instructional teaching strategies to meet the needs of students. However, these strategies tended to focus on large group instruction or lecture. Most teachers replied that they did not tier assignments and a majority of teachers used multiple choice tests, essays, and demonstration to measure student achievement. A majority of respondents made adjustments to align their lessons with the Standards as opposed to beginning by planning with the Standards in mind. Oak Hill achieved a rating of 2 for NYS Essential Element Four and fell below the Standard Deviation for implementing this Element to a lesser degree than the other school in the study. Oak Hill staff members credited their administrators with providing BOCES trainings on a wealth of relevant topics. Another teacher commented, “educational leaders in the building know and understand middle grade students.”

Oak Hill received a rating of 3 for NYS Essential Element Five on the survey, but received a 2 rating based on the interviews. Questions in the survey focused on the quality of professional development opportunities and having a caring culture within the school. Both of these were strong traits for Oak Hill. However, administration and staff had a moderate understanding of middle grade research and philosophy. Having a smaller, caring culture where

everyone knows each other helped Oak Hill when it came to NYS Essential Element Six, which centers on every student having access to a supportive system for both academic and emotional needs.

3. To what degree do the schools implement the NYS Essential Elements based on both the survey and interview results? How do the survey and interview measures compare to each other? Why do or don't schools implement best practices that align with the NYS Essential Elements?

A brief description of each question found in both the survey and interview are shared below. Each question is aligned with the NYS Essential Element it collects evidence for. After each question, there is a brief summary of how participants answered the question. This data serves as evidence toward the rating each school receives for each of the Seven NYS Essential Elements. Evidence from both the survey and interview is shared and each school will receive a final rating that reflects the degree in which each school applies each NYS Essential Element.

Oak Hill – Philosophy and Mission (1)

The First of Seven New York State Essential Elements requires schools to have a philosophy and mission that reflect the intellectual and developmental needs and characteristics of young adolescents. A large majority of staff answered yes to question number 2. The mission statement for Oak Hill does reflect meeting the social, emotional, intellectual and academic needs of all students. During the interview, it became apparent that teachers felt strongly about the fact that they were able to meet the social and emotional needs of their students in large part due to their small size. One teacher replied, “Our teachers do meet the social and emotional needs of our students along with the at risk team.” Another teacher said, “Our teachers really know the students and look after them to meet their social and emotional needs.” The staff also

had programs in place to meet the academic and intellectual needs of students. A program called check in / check out has students check in with a staff member, who is a mentor, at both the beginning and end of the day. The staff member checks to make sure the student has basic supplies, including homework, and connects with the student socially to support them as needed in dealing with stress and pressure in and out of school. Academic needs are also met through an after school tutorial program. Another teacher shared, “We have an after school tutorial program for students who need it.” Staff members also said teachers were willing to stay after school and provide academic support for students in need of it. Oak Hill earns a 3 for implementing NYS Essential Element One to a high degree on both the survey and interview.

Oak Hill – Educational Program (2)

How much are these characteristics a focus for your school as a whole? The characteristics include academic, social, ethical, physical, and emotional needs of students. Respondents can choose from an exclusive, primary, or less of a focus for each characteristic. Question 3 measures Essential Element Two. This element focuses on schools having an educational program that is challenging and standards-based, as well as comprehensive, integrated, and relevant. Oak Hill is the only school that has a majority of people in four of five categories who believed that character is a primary or exclusive focus. Less attention was given to ethical and physical characteristics; however, only one of five respondents said emotional and social is less of a focus. No one said academics are less of a focus and 80% of Oak Hill respondents felt that social needs are a primary focus.

Question 5 describes the extent of implementation that a visitor would observe on

any given day for each of these qualities. The items listed focus on measuring Element Two and the degree to which the educational program is comprehensive, challenging, purposeful, integrated, relevant, and standards-based. Specific qualities include common expectations for writing, literacy and numeracy across all disciplines, the use of data and benchmark assessments to monitor learning and adapt instruction, engagement of the family and local community in the personal development of students, as well as a program that is challenging, rigorous and purposeful.

Oak Hill has 80%, or four of five, respondents reply that all qualities listed in question 5 are regularly observable more than half the time throughout the school. These are very strong results for every category including, but not limited to, the school having a common set of learning skills, an emphasis on social, physical, and ethical development, interdisciplinary connections that promote the standards, benchmark assessments to monitor student learning, timely and targeted academic intervention services, and an academic program that is challenging, rigorous and purposeful . On the survey, Oak Hill earns 2.7 out of 3 for implementing NYS Essential Element Two to a high degree.

Teachers pointed out during interviews that they had just started receiving trainings from BOCES on the Common Core. Teachers also shared, “Our curriculum is mapped out for all subjects and is updated. We have a ton of Readers and Writers workshop support from BOCES. We also have excellent trainings on how to utilize technology in the classroom and we have good technology.” The administrative team is supporting staff members to receive the training needed to maintain a Standards Based, rigorous curriculum. However, the process of shifting to meet the rigor associated with the new Common Core Standards was new at the time of the interview during the 2012-2013 school year.

Oak Hill has also focused on training teachers to implement technology into the classroom. Teachers have been provided with excellent professional development opportunities related to technology. One teacher remarked, “We have excellent trainings on how to utilize technology in the classroom and we have good technology. I think this has everything to do with having a good administration.” Teachers have confidence that they have the professional development support to continue learning and growing. This allows more teachers to take the risk that is needed to integrate technology and adapt instructional strategies.

Oak Hill earns a rating of 2 following interviews for implementing NYS Essential Element Two to a moderate degree. In order to have earned a 3 for NYS Essential Element Two, Oak Hill would have had to be able to prove that their curriculum and assessments had already been adapted to meet the new Common Core State Standards. This was not the case, although they were working on making those shifts when the interview occurred.

Oak Hill – Organization and Structure (3)

NYS Essential Element Three measures whether or not an organization has a structure that supports both academic excellence and personal development. Does the school educate the whole child? Question 6 asked staff members to rate the extent to which the regular work of the interdisciplinary teams agrees with a list of nine different statements. The eight statements include agenda use for meetings, focus on curriculum and instruction, common strategies and expectations, special events for students, focus on student behavior, the social and emotional needs of students, coordinated curriculum and assignments, and common planning time opportunities. The entire question is based on how teams work together and function. Oak Hill had mixed results. Eighty percent, or 4 out of 5 staff members replied that interdisciplinary teams almost always focus on the behavior of their students along with the social and emotional

needs of their students. Another 60%, or three out of five, interdisciplinary teams coordinate curricula most of the time. Four out of five, or 80% of Oak Hill respondents also believed their interdisciplinary teams employ common strategies and expectations almost always. On the other hand, 40% replied that they do not have common planning time. Another staff member replied that teams use an agenda for their meetings less than half of the time, and the same amount focused on curriculum and instruction during team meetings and the same amount of interdisciplinary teams coordinate assignments and assessments.

What is the extent of student participation in the following programs in your school? This is question 13, which aligns with NYS Essential Element Three. School programs being measured include extracurricular sports for 7th and 8th graders, student clubs, informal after school help with teachers, formal after school programs that help students receive academic intervention services (AIS), and coordinated service learning opportunities. The scale that records the degree of participation includes almost all students, more than half the students, approximately half the students, less than half the students, and a few students. Oak Hill only had one person, or 20%, select more than half the students participate in formal school sponsored after school activities. No other activity had more than half the students participate. Eighty percent, or 4 of 5, replied that half the students participate in modified sports. Less than half or only a few students participating was selected by 80% of respondents for clubs, informal after school help, and formal after school help, 60% for AIS, and 60% more replied that coordinated service learning activities do not exist.

Question 14 asked respondents, does your school have interdisciplinary teams? This is one of the few yes / no questions in the survey. In spite of this, there is still some variability in the data. Interdisciplinary teams are essential to a school creating a close, supportive

environment. They are also critical for a school trying to meet the academic, intellectual, social, and emotional needs of students. Two of five or 40% of respondents said they have interdisciplinary teams.

How often a team meets is critical to ensure the team has the time it needs to plan together. This is question number 15, which aligns with NYS Essential Element Three. Oak Hill had only two respondents who both selected one meeting per week. Why the other staff members skipped this question is unknown. Perhaps, they felt uncomfortable answering since the two who did answer selected one time a week.

During interviews respondents shared, “Yes we have both two person teams and four person teams. The four-person team teaches 7th and 8th graders and they do not have common planning, which makes it tough. The 5th and 6th grade teachers get together regularly.” In this instance, the survey data does not match the interview data. One staff member explains, “Some of the middle school teachers have to teach high school electives so we cannot schedule a common planning time for them to meet. They do meet 2-3 times a week when they can before or after school to discuss students and plan together.” This answer suggests, the staff has taken ownership of the problem and worked around it. Teams definitely find it difficult to meet and common planning is not regularly scheduled.

In spite of having difficulties scheduling common team planning, teams still found many ways at Oak Hill to strike a balance while meeting both the academic and emotional needs of students. One teacher shared, “Teacher teams look after the students and they know the students.” Another teacher remarked, “I do feel our teachers look after the social and emotional needs of our students, because they know them so well.” Even if teams did not hold scheduled team planning, the teachers and administrators at Oak Hill still found ways to meet informally to

discuss students. The smaller student body, around 470 students K-12 or roughly 39 students per graduating class, made it easier to really get to know the students in each class.

Oak Hill is too small of a school to have a Principal dedicated to middle grades 5-8 only. In fact, the Principal oversees grades K-12. Because Oak Hill teachers are being asked to teach more high school courses, they do not have time in their schedule for common planning at grades 7 and 8. Both of these characteristics serve as hurdles to developing a middle grade philosophy and program designed to meet the specific needs of middle grade students. However, the small size of Oak Hill makes up for what they lack in organization and structure. Because there are so few students, teachers feel confident they know every student and are able to positively connect with them and meet their academic and emotional needs.

Oak Hill School earned a 1.3 on the survey and a weak 2.0 rating on the interviews for organization and structure. The survey score of 1.3 fell below the standard deviation for NYS Essential Element Four. Oak Hill has made decisions to cut staff and this has led to middle school teachers teaching high school courses and thereby eliminating regularly scheduled common team planning. This is an area of weakness for Oak Hill. Teams need time to plan ways to meet the varying needs of their students. It is encouraging that the small size of the school, and the fact that teachers meet informally outside of common team planning, did result in students getting some of the help they need. However, not having an established common team time will result in a lack of commitment toward teaming as soon as a team member decides it is not important to them. Having structures such as teaming, advisory, counseling, and academic support available for students are essential to meeting the needs of all students. Oak Hill has abandoned some aspects of the recommended middle school structure including common team planning time and advisor/advisee. The smaller environment does help staff get to know and

support students but the lack of middle school programs and organizational positions creates gaps in their efforts to meet the needs of students.

Oak Hill – Classroom Instruction (4)

Classroom instruction needs to be appropriate to the needs and characteristics of young adolescents as well as provided by skilled and knowledgeable teachers. This is what NYS Essential Element Four measures.

Question 8 on the survey asked staff members from the four schools to rate the extent to which a visitor would observe the following instructional strategies on a typical day in their classroom as well as other classrooms around the building. Instructional strategies that are listed include, whole class instruction, lecture, guided reading groups, inquiry based lab experiences, follow the directions lab experiences, cooperative groups, student to student discussion, literature circle/reading clubs, tiered assignments, differentiated assignments, student choices, peer tutoring, and reading and/or writing workshops. Question 8 aligns with Essential Element Four, which focuses on providing classroom instruction appropriate to the needs and characteristics of young adolescents provided by skilled and knowledgeable teachers. The least used instructional strategies were tiered assignments and literature circles. They were selected by 100% or all five teachers for being used less than half the time or never using them. Overall, a majority of 60% of respondents, or three out of five teachers, felt they use instructional strategies half the time or greater for eight out of the fifteen questions. Element Four measures whether or not the instructional strategy used meets the needs of the learners in the classroom. The results for question 8 indicate that Oak Hill does a moderate job of varying instructional strategies to meet the needs of their learners.

Question 9 asked respondents to please rate the extent to which they use each of the following approaches on typical assessments: demonstration, document based question, essay and written response, multiple choice, portfolio-based assessment, practicing format of state test, presentation, and project based. This question aligns with Essential Element Four; the use of classroom assessments that are instructionally useful indicators of individual student growth and performance not only to monitor each student's progress in meeting the State's learning standards, but also to plan instruction. The question also asked respondents to share the frequency of use for each type of assessment. To inform the teacher fully about the student's ability to apply knowledge learned across several areas a variety of assessments should be used. Oak Hill had 40%, or two out of five, respondents say they almost always use demonstration, document based questions, or multiple choice as assessments. Another 60%, or three out of five, said they used essay or written response half the time and 20% said they use it more than half the time while the remaining 20% said they almost always use it. The most popular form of assessment selected was demonstration with more than 80% using it more than half the time and the least popular was portfolio based assessment with 40% saying they use it less than half the time and 40% replying they almost never use it. Oak Hill is moderate when it comes to meeting the needs of students by varying the types of assessments they take.

Which statement best describes the use of the NYS Learning Standards by the predominance of teachers in your school? Oak Hill had one person or 20% respond that they began all planning with the standards. Three others or 60% made adjustments to their lessons in order to align them with the Standards. The last person continued to use pre-existing lessons and only referenced the lessons. This is Question 12 in the survey and it measures the degree schools implement the NYS Learning Standards. Essential Element Four, component five, asks teachers

to know and understand each of the State's twenty-eight learning standards, and when and where it is appropriate to routinely reinforce them during regular classroom instruction. Oak Hill is at the beginning stage of implementing the Common Core Standards similar to all schools in New York State at this time.

During the interview, staff members spoke about receiving a wealth of professional development opportunities, but they did not share evidence of implementing a variety of instructional strategies and assessments in the classroom. Through BOCES a wealth of professional development opportunities are provided. A staff member commented during interviews that professional development was excellent due to opportunities provided by BOCES and every teacher had exceeded the 175 professional development hours required by New York State. Another teacher commented, "We have excellent trainings on how to use technology in the classroom and we have good access to technology."

Trainings related to new instructional strategies and new forms of assessment are not always brought back to the classroom as evidenced by survey questions 8 and 9 above. Learning a variety of instructional and assessment strategies and implementing them into the classroom is hit or miss depending on the teacher. Teachers are beginning to work with the Common Core ELA and math Standards. All teachers need to begin planning with the Standards in mind.

Oak Hill earned a rating of 2 on both the survey and interview, which indicates they implemented NYS Essential Element Four. Oak Hill rated below the standard deviation for NYS Essential Element Four. The school provides a wealth of professional development opportunities that allows staff members to stay informed about the latest instructional strategies. However, these same strategies and a variety of assessments were not applied frequently in the classroom to meet the varying needs of students. The school has begun to make the instructional shift to

implement the new Common Core Standards, but at the time of the survey and interview, they were not in place. This is an area of weakness for Oak Hill School.

Oak Hill – Educational Leadership (5)

Strong educational leadership and a building administration that encourage, facilitate, and sustain involvement, participation, and partnerships are indicative of NYS Essential Element Five. Question 7 aligns with NYS Essential Element Five. It focuses on describing the teaching staff in each building, which reflects on administrative leadership and their ability to influence the attitudes and beliefs of their staff. The four statements include, teachers are consistently caring and respectful in their interactions with students and adults, teachers have a deep understanding of their subject matter of different approaches to student learning and of diverse teaching techniques, teachers provide instruction that is consistently standards based, challenging, rigorous and purposeful, and teachers thoroughly know and understand the needs and developmental characteristics of young adolescents. Staff members are able to select from all or almost all of the staff, more than half the staff, approximately half the staff, less than half the staff, or none or very few of the staff. The answer is a reflection on the type and emphasis of the educational leadership. Oak Hill has 100% of respondents who feel almost all or more than half the teachers are consistently caring and respectful in their interactions with students and adults and thoroughly knew about the developmental needs of students. Eighty-three percent feel almost all or more than half the teachers have a deep understanding of their subject matter and diverse ways to teach it along with providing instruction that is standards based, rigorous, challenging, and purposeful. This evidence is contradicted in question 8 when 100% of staff members felt they differentiated instruction or used literature circles rarely or never. This evidence appears to indicate the Oak Hill teachers feel they have a deep understanding of their

content, but this does not translate into using a variety of instructional strategies to meet the varying academic needs of the students.

Question 16 asked respondents, to describe the extent of academic and personal support available for students. A wide variety of categories explored include: adults and older youth serve as positive role models, positive behaviors are recognized and affirmed, respect and caring engender a feeling of self-worth, self-confidence, and personal efficacy among students, staff and students have opportunities to examine, explore, discuss, and understand the changes associated with early adolescence, counseling and guidance services assist students in making life, career, and educational choices, a network of trained professionals, special programs, and community resources are available to assist those who have extraordinary needs and require additional services, and an adult mentor is available to students either formally through a teacher/student, advisor/advisee program or informally through a school culture of caring in which teachers or other adults assume responsibility for individual students. The range of selections available to choose from vary between conclusive, extensive, considerable, some evidence, minimal evidence, trace evidence, and no evidence. The answers to this question are reflective of the educational leadership needed to facilitate and sustain partnerships to meet the needs of students. Oak Hill strongly rated their school high in these areas. Four out of five, or 80%, of respondents felt there was conclusive or extensive evidence that positive behaviors were recognized and affirmed, respect and caring engender a feeling of self-worth and self-confidence among students. Counseling and guidance services assist students while making decisions and a network of trained professionals are available to assist students who have extraordinary needs. No one felt there was no evidence for any area and only the adult mentor program was selected by two out of four or 40% as having only a trace of evidence.

During the interview, staff members were complimentary of the administrative team. One staff member said, “I think this (professional development) has everything to do with having a good administration.” Educational leaders in the building know and understand middle level students. The Principal appeared to have knowledge of the NYS Essential Elements. However, the staff was not very familiar with the NYS Essential Elements and they have received little to no training on how to implement them. It is not clear why administration has not focused more on training staff on how to implement the NYS Essential Elements. Increasing their understanding of the NYS Essential Elements would enable them to rely on the Elements as a resource to better meet the needs of students. By not teaching and promoting the NYS Essential Elements, the Principal stymies opportunities for individuals to take responsibility to better meet the needs of students.

The staff may not be as familiar as they should be with the NYS Essential Elements, but professional development maintains a focus on meeting the needs of students through RtI, Capturing Kids Hearts, and other programs that focus on meeting the needs of students. Oak Hill earned a rating of 3 on the survey and 2 for the interview. The survey rating was based on the school having a culture that cared for and met the needs of all students. This is a reflection on administration. The interview included evidence that administration was supportive of establishing a culture that met the needs of students. There was little evidence that administration was an instructional leader who led the integration of the Standards. Administration failed to educate the staff about the NYS Essential Elements and made cuts that led to the end of scheduled common team planning time. This evidence resulted in Oak Hill earning a rating of 2 for NYS Essential Element Five on the interview.

Oak Hill – Academic and Personal Support (6)

A network of academic and personal support needs to be available for all students. NYS Essential Element Six requires schools to provide mentors, counselors, and positive role models to connect with students and help meet the emotional and academic needs of students. Question 4 in the survey aligns with NYS Essential Element Six. To what extent would the staff commit to each statement as a responsibility of your school? Oak Hill respondents believed that more than half the staff are committed to accepting responsibility for the academic and personal development of each student, making connections with students, connecting students to their school, ensuring a safe, trusting learning environment, providing successful transitions, and working together to ensure that all students achieve at a high level. Only one staff member believed half of the staff, establishes partnerships with the home, while the others selected all or more than half establishes partnerships with the home.

Survey question number 10, asked respondents from each school to rate how their school utilized a list of communication strategies with parents and families. The rating scale included, almost always, more than half the time, half the time, less than half the time, and almost never. The communication strategies included school wide report cards, occasionally written progress reports, regular written progress reports, student led conferences, phone calls home, parent teacher conferences, school wide progress reports, a web based system with home access to student information, and parent team conferences. Question 10 aligns with Essential Element Six because it relates to schools having a process for informing parents, families, and community groups of the essential role they play in ensuring student success. Similar to the other schools, Oak Hill had all five staff members select almost always for school wide report cards and 80%, or four of five, selected almost always for the use of web based system with home access. Sixty percent, or three of five, selected almost always for printed school wide progress reports. There

were items that respondents felt the school almost never used. Eighty percent, or four of five, felt student led conferences are almost never used. Another 40% felt that parent teacher conferences are almost never used. Overall, a majority, or at least three of five, respondents said they felt the school used one of the nine communication strategies either more than half or almost always in four of the nine categories, and a majority, or at least three of five, respondents said they felt the school used one of the nine communication strategies either less than half or almost never in four of the nine categories.

Question 11 asked respondents to rate their school in the following areas? The respondents selected from categories of conclusive evidence, extensive evidence, considerable evidence, some evidence, minimal evidence, trace evidence, and no evidence. Respondents assessed their school in several areas including, connecting each adolescent with the school in a positive manner, a structure to create close, sustained, relationships, teacher teams that are responsible for a group of students, a school culture of mutual support and collective responsibility for each student, counseling and guidance services, planning collaboratively and providing staff development opportunities, and emphasis of personal development. Question 11 aligns closest with Essential Element Six emphasizing a network of academic and personal support for all students. At Oak Hill 60%, or three out of five, respondents felt there is conclusive evidence of collaboration while planning staff development opportunities. Another 60% felt there is either extensive or conclusive evidence of guidance services to effectively assist students. A majority of respondents, or three out of five, believed there is either considerable, extensive, or conclusiveness evidence of four of the seven areas. However, in the three areas where the majority did not feel there was strong evidence in support of the area most selected some evidence. For example, 80%, or four of five, felt there was some evidence of teacher

teams taking responsibility for the development of students and 40% felt there is some evidence of making personal connections with students and being structured to create close, sustained relationships.

Interviews revealed that Oak Hill is a smaller, personalized environment and this provides an opportunity for students and staff to develop positive, supportive, and professional relationships. Teams have been trained in Capturing Kids Hearts and Positive Behavioral Interventions. There are many counseling services for students who need help. Oak Hill also has a mentoring program known as check in check out. Students check in with a mentor in the morning to start their day and check out with them at the end of the day. Oak Hill received high marks when it came to providing a supportive environment for students. One teacher put it best, “If a student comes to school and has a problem or is upset, teachers and staff members see it right away and they get the student help and support or provide it themselves. Everyone knows everyone in our school.” Other teachers spoke about their RTI and after-school tutorial program that helped meet the academic needs of students as well. “I feel our teachers do meet the social and emotional needs of our students along with the At Risk Team.” Another teacher spoke about having an after school tutorial program for students who need it and always trying to provide a pleasant environment for students to learn. Oak Hill earned a 2.2 on the survey but received a 3 on the interview as a result of strong evidence that indicated the staff was very conscious about meeting the individual needs of all students. Oak Hill rated well on question 4. The question was whether staff members were committed to meeting the academic and personal needs of all students. However, they rated poorly on question 10 when asked how many communication strategies for communicating with parents were in place. Question 11 focused on whether or not the school had the culture and programs in place to meet the personal needs of students. Oak

Hill scored poorly in this area in spite of providing counseling programs, teaming, and a mentor program. It may have been due to the elimination of common planning time and the weakening of a team's ability to assume responsibility for the personal well-being of a group of students.

The survey and interview results are somewhat contradictory in this instance.

Oak Hill – Professional Development (7)

Every young adolescent deserves an educational setting that values continuous improvement and ongoing professional learning. New York State Essential Element Seven centers on whether or not the school focuses on continuous improvement through targeted professional development that will result in meeting the academic and social needs of students. Question 17 focuses on the degree of professional training that is available in your school. There are five categories that include, principals and teachers know the needs and characteristics of middle level students along with instructional strategies that help these students, staff have high expectations for all students, teachers have opportunities to learn about and understand their subject matter, teachers participate in staff development opportunities, and the school has taken a proactive approach in providing training in the Common Core. The range of selections available vary from conclusive, extensive, considerable, some evidence, minimal evidence, trace evidence, and no evidence.

The question aligns with Essential Element Seven because they both measure the degree that professional learning and staff development for all staff are ongoing, planned, purposeful, and collaboratively developed. Oak Hill has four out of five or five out of five staff members who felt there is conclusive, extensive or considerable evidence that Oak Hill provides training so that principals and teachers know the needs and

characteristics of middle level students along with instructional strategies that help these students, staff have high expectations for all students, teachers have opportunities to learn about and understand their subject matter, teachers participate in staff development opportunities, and the school has taken a proactive approach in providing training in the Common Core.

During interviews staff members felt Oak Hill does an excellent job providing rich learning opportunities for teachers. BOCES plays a lead role in providing professional development for rural schools in Western New York. One teacher confirmed this by saying, “Professional development is excellent because of BOCES.” Other teachers complimented Oak Hill’s professional development opportunities by sharing, “When it comes to professional development, we are rich in professional development and we need it with all of the changes going on in education.” Oak Hill earned a rating of 3 on both the survey and interview. There are plenty of opportunities for teachers to grow and learn. However, the administration does not provide enough opportunities for teachers to learn about the NYS Essential Elements. This is an area of weakness that needs to be addressed by Oak Hill in the future.

4. How does Oak Hill balance meeting the social, emotional, academic and intellectual needs’ of all students?

Oak Hill staff members understand and practice the philosophy of meeting the needs of their students. As one staff member put it, “The benefit of having a small school is that the teachers take care of the students. This includes focusing on their social and emotional needs and the cool thing is, this is true across all grade levels, including high school.” Another teacher commented, “We have a variety of counseling services available for students who need help.

Our teachers really know the students and look after them to meet their social and emotional needs.”

Oak Hill has RtI in place to help meet the varied academic needs and it has a mentoring program to help meet the social and emotional needs of all students along with plenty of counseling services. The entire teaching staff at Oak Hill has been trained in Capturing Kids Hearts. The program teaches educators strategies to positively connect with students and meet their social and emotional needs. Meeting this need is critical when trying to motivate students to learn. In addition to Capturing Kids Hearts, Oak Hill has a check in check out program. The program has the student select a staff member whom they have a positive connection with and check in with that person in the morning before they start the school day and again at the end of the day. The quick check at the beginning of the day is to make sure they are ready, alert, not upset, and that their homework is completed. At the end of the day the student checks in again so the mentor can set eyes on the student and make sure everything is okay prior to them going home. When considered, this exactly what most parents do when the student leaves in the morning and returns home at the end of the day. It is further evidence that students need adults to care for them and look after them while they are at school. Public school educators go above and beyond to support students in so many ways. It requires time, effort, and people to provide this type of support. Oak Hill earned a 3 rating for NYS Essential Element Six. They can be proud of the tremendous support network they provide for students in need. In this instance, their small size worked to their advantage.

Oak Hill had a lot of evidence related to providing a wealth of professional development opportunities for staff members to participate in. These opportunities included integrating technology into the classroom using a variety of devices and strategies, Common Core training,

Capturing Kids Hearts, Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, and Literacy training in Reader's and Writer's Workshop. In spite of having many opportunities to attend trainings, none of the staff members discussed receiving training on the NYS Essential Elements for Standards Focused Middle Level Schools and Programs. Oak Hill managed to implement some best practices that aligned with each Element without knowing they aligned with the Elements. Oak Hill implemented NYS Essential Element Seven to a moderate degree because of the varied staff development opportunities provided mostly by BOCES. They would benefit from explicitly teaching and using the NYS Essential Elements to evaluate their programs and school. Oak Hill received a 2 rating in this area for both the survey and the interview.

Oak Hill could have increased their focus on the NYS Essential Elements to focus their entire staff on implementing research-based practices that make the learning experience better for students, families, and staff members. Overall, they applied the NYS Essential Elements to a high degree. What stood out about Oak Hill was the tremendous care and concern the staff expressed for their students and the joy it brought them to help their kids succeed in and out of the classroom.

5. What are the obstacles faced by schools when they try to implement the NYS Essential Elements? What can be done to overcome these hurdles?

Obstacles to implementing the NYS Essential Elements include a lack of understanding what the NYS Essential Elements are and their benefit to meeting the needs of students. They also include not having the organizational structure that supports important aspects of implementing the NYS Essential Elements such as teaming or houses. A lack of funding may also be an obstacle to implementing the NYS Essential Elements. Staff members who do not

have the will or desire to go above and beyond to meet the needs of students also serves as a hurdle to implementing the NYS Essential Elements.

Oak Hill staff members had plenty of training in programs such as RtI and Capturing Kids Hearts, which focus on meeting the needs of students, but they did not have targeted training on the NYS Essential Elements. In addition, they have a K-12 Principal, which means the focus is on all three levels, elementary, middle, and high school. While the Principal was aware of the Elements, decisions were made by administration and the Board of Education to cut teaching staff, which led to a loss in scheduled common planning time. Oak Hill faces the hurdles of a lack of knowledge about the NYS Essential Elements and a K-12 organizational structure that shares teachers between middle and high school grades.

Since 2008, New York State has reduced Oak Hill's State Aid. This resulted in cuts to the teaching staff and a need to have middle grade teachers with secondary certification teach high school courses as well as their previous middle grade courses. As a result, teams lost their scheduled common planning time. Some teams work together to meet regularly on their own and others meet when they are available. The loss of teaming is a significant loss to the organizational structure that makes a school a middle school. Teaming is central to implementing the Middle Level Essential Elements. Without common planning time, it becomes more difficult for teams to get together and discuss meeting the social, emotional, academic, and intellectual needs of all students. A lack of funding has led to a decrease in the degree to which Oak Hill implements the Essential Elements of Middle Level Programs.

Oak Hill does have a teaching staff who are willing to go above and beyond to support their students. The smaller environment combined with this positive attitude allows Oak Hill to overcome many of the obstacles they face. Oak Hill has the highest number of students who

receive free and reduced lunch. Around 65% of their students receive free and reduced lunch each year. Staff members strive to fill in where the family may not meet the basic emotional and academic needs of their students. “We have an after school tutorial program for students who need it. We also try as teachers to provide a pleasant environment for our students to learn. For example, many teachers provide incentives to students for doing great work and communication between teachers is great. If a student has a problem, someone usually knows and they get help for the student.” Another teacher added, “Check in check out mentors ask students if there homework is done and if they have the supplies they need for the day.” When the staff understands these basic needs of students they are much more willing to go above and beyond to meet these needs. Oak Hill may not have had formal training in the NYS Essential Elements but they sure understood that students have basic needs they have to support in order for students to be successful learners.

6. What is the relationship between the degree of implementation of the NYS Essential Elements and student achievement?

From 2010-2012, Oak Hill’s moderate percentage of students scoring at level 3 or 4 in ELA was 49% and in math 43%. In ELA they matched the three year state average of 49%, but in math Oak Hill’s 43% was far below the state moderate of 58% of students scoring at levels 3 or 4. These scores are disappointing given the fact that Oak Hill implemented the Essential Elements above a moderate degree with a 2.43 and 2.29 out of 3.0 rating. Oak Hill implemented the Essential Elements to the second highest degree among the four schools participating in the study their test scores were tied for last in ELA and finished last in math. If students do not score a level 3 or 4 they are required to be considered for academic intervention services for

falling behind what is considered college and career ready by New York State Education Department

Walnut Hill School Overview

1. What are the demographics of Walnut Hill School?

Walnut Hill is located in the Southern Tier of Western New York. Student population ranges between 600-700 students and they graduate around 45-55 students per class. Middle level grades are in a building that also contains grades K-12. There is one Principal who oversees grades Pre-K – 6 and another Principal who oversees grades 7-12. Free and reduced lunch rate is 31%; this is the lowest rating among all four schools but still very high. Class sizes are small with only twelve to seventeen students on moderate per class. The suspension rate is a mere 1-2% and the attendance rate is always around 95-96%; both of which are among the best in comparison to the other three schools. The Principal has about four years of experience. Using a scale of 1-3 to rate the knowledge of middle grade education with 1 being below moderate, 2 being moderate, and 3 being above moderate, the Principal self-rates knowledge of middle grade philosophy as a 2 and rates the staff's knowledge as a 1. The school implemented research based middle grade best practices in spite of not having professional development about the NYS Essential Elements. As a result they scored well on a number of NYS Essential Elements despite not working to intentionally implement them. In fact, respondents did not reveal having any direct training on the NYS Essential Elements. The data indicates that this school has a slightly better socio-economic status than the other three. This translates into fewer students facing the hurdles of poverty, but 31% is still a fairly large number of students living in poverty.

2. How are the middle grades organized at Walnut Hill? Is the organization configured to support a high degree of implementation of the NYS Essential Elements?

Walnut Hill has both an elementary and secondary building on the same campus. Because one Principal covers elementary (K-6) and the other secondary grades (7-12), there is no Principal or building for middle grades only. This can lead to a lack of focus and understanding of middle grade philosophy and the students it serves. The unique needs of middle school students' require administrators and teachers to be aware of these needs and have the appropriate programs such as advisor/advisee in place to meet these needs. It could also explain why the staff has little training on the NYS Essential Elements and why Walnut Hill made the decision to assign secondary teachers to both middle and high school grades, which eliminates common team planning. When combined with elementary or secondary grades, middle grades can be "lost in the middle." This phrase refers to districts focusing on and investing resources into primary grade levels and high school grade levels, while overlooking the programming and staffing needs of the middle level. These schools can struggle to meet the needs of students, which results in students acting out or performing and behaving poorly.

3. To what degree do the schools implement the NYS Essential Elements based on both the survey and interview results? How do the survey and interview measures compare to each other? Why do or don't schools implement best practices that align with the NYS Essential Elements?

A brief description of each question found in both the survey and interview are shared below. Each question aligns with the NYS Essential Element for which it collects evidence. After each question, there is a brief summary of how participants answered the question. This

data serves as evidence toward the rating each school receives for each of the Seven NYS Essential Elements. Evidence from both the survey and interview are shared and each school will receive a final rating that reflects the degree in which each school applies each NYS Essential Element.

Walnut Hill – Philosophy and Mission (1)

Question 2 in the survey measures Essential Element One. This element centers on each school having a philosophy and mission that reflects the intellectual and developmental needs of students. The overwhelming majority of staff responded yes to this question. Walnut Hill's mission statement includes language about meeting both the intellectual and developmental needs of all students. Walnut Hill earned a 3 rating for both the survey and interview.

Walnut Hill – Educational Program (2)

Question 3 on the survey aligns with NYS Essential Element Two. NYS Essential Element Two focuses on schools having an educational program that is challenging and standards-based, as well as comprehensive, integrated, and relevant. The Element also emphasizes not only intellectual development but also personal, social, physical, and ethical development. The question asks respondents how much are these characteristics a focus for your school as a whole. The characteristics include academic, social, ethical, physical, and emotional needs of students. Respondents can choose exclusive, primary, or less of a focus for each characteristic. Nine to eleven out of eighteen respondents felt there is less of a focus on the social, ethical, physical, and emotional characteristics in their school.

Question 5 describes the extent of implementation a visitor would observe on any given day for each of these qualities. Specific qualities include common expectations for writing, literacy and numeracy across all disciplines, the use of data and benchmark assessments to

monitor learning and adapt instruction, engagement of the family and local community in the personal development of students, and a program that is challenging, rigorous and purposeful. Walnut Hill has 44%, or eight out of seventeen, respondents who said it is observable almost all of the time and that the program is thoroughly challenging, rigorous, and purposeful. In fact, more than 50% of respondents felt these qualities are regularly observable in more than half the school for ten of the eleven qualities. Another 44% of the respondents felt that more than half of the academic program is regularly observable as explicitly articulated vertically and horizontally within and across the various curricular areas, learning standards, and grade levels. Survey results also indicate that 17% of respondents, or three of eighteen, felt there is none or very little observable evidence of a common set of learning skills such as how to read or take notes, and another 17% felt there is little to no evidence of a common set of benchmark assessments to routinely monitor student learning. Fifty-six percent, or ten of eighteen, felt there is a common set of learning skills. These results indicate a moderate degree of implementation of the NYS Essential Elements.

During the interview, Walnut Hill respondents commented on having many professional development opportunities to learn about the Common Core and technology in spite of having other conferences reduced due to budget cuts. The curriculum is mapped out during a few staff development days a year. Elementary, middle and high school teachers work together over the summer to make curricular changes. English language arts and math teachers have begun to make the shift to the Common Core Standards as well. “This summer and last summer the focus was on the common core.” Walnut Hill is still in the beginning stages of shifting the curriculum to align with the Common Core. Walnut Hill focuses on instructional strategies and providing students with a rigorous curriculum combined with high expectations for all students. However,

the staff did not feel there is a common set of learning skills and they are in the beginning stages of adapting to the Common Core. They earned a rating of 2 for implementing NYS Essential Element Two to a moderate degree.

Walnut Hill has not explicitly trained staff members about the NYS Essential Elements and they have not evaluated their current practices using the NYS Essential Elements. If the school were to carry out these procedures, they would identify the areas in need of improvement. Next, they could use the evaluation results to develop action plans that lead to measureable goals. This would allow the school to improve their ability to meet the academic, social, ethical, physical, and emotional needs of students.

Walnut Hill – Organization and Structure (3)

Question six asks staff members to rate the extent to which the regular work of the teams agrees with a list of eight different statements. The eight statements include agenda use for meetings, focus on curriculum and instruction, common strategies and expectations, special events for students, focus on student behavior, the social and emotional needs of students, coordinated curriculum and assignments, and common planning time opportunities. The question is based on how teams work together and function. Walnut Hill did not score favorably in regards to the work of interdisciplinary teams. The category “never happens” was selected by 47%, or seven of fifteen, staff members when asked if teams used an agenda for the meeting, and 40%, or six of fifteen, said they never coordinate assignments or assessments. Twenty-seven percent, or four of fifteen, said teams never talk about curriculum and instruction, common strategies and expectations, social, and emotional needs of students, and 33% or, five of fifteen, said they never coordinate curricula.

Question 13 on the survey asks respondents to please rate the extent of student participation in the following programs in their school. School programs being measured include extracurricular sports for 7th and 8th graders, clubs, informal after school help with teachers, formal after school programs that help students, academic intervention services (AIS), and coordinated service learning opportunities. The scale that records the degree of participation includes almost all students, more than half the students, approximately half the students, less than half the students, and a few students. It measures, NYS Essential Element Three, which measures how schools provide a variety of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities as well as opportunities for students to participate in youth service, community service and/or service learning activities. The category almost all was selected by 27%, or four of fifteen, 16%, or two of seven, for clubs, and 6% or, one of seven, selected formal school sponsored activities. A majority of respondents selected more than half of the students participate when it came to modified sports and clubs. However, these were the only two programs where a majority of respondents selected, more than half the participants participated. A majority of respondents selected three programs, AIS after school, coordinated service learning programs, and formal school sponsored after school programs as not existing. The only category left to discuss is the informal after school help program. Fifty-three percent said few participants participate.

Does your school have interdisciplinary teams? This is question 14 and it aligns with NYS Essential Element Three. NYS Essential Element Three explains that teacher teams need to share responsibility for the education and personal development of a common group of students. Fifteen of seventeen, or 88%, of Walnut Hill staff said they do have interdisciplinary teams. This is strong evidence that teams exist. Interviews clarify how the teams function.

Question 15 asks staff members how often do your interdisciplinary teams meet in a week. Choices available range from five times a week down to teams who do not meet at all. Different grade levels can meet a different number of times based on the master schedule and the assignments of the teachers. Question 15 aligns most closely with Essential Element Three. Walnut Hill had only one respondent to this question who selected one meeting per week. Walnut Hill has teaming, but they rarely meet and there is no scheduled planning time.

Interviews revealed concerns about not having common planning time scheduled. “We don’t have common planning time, so the challenges are that most of those teachers are teaching something at both the junior high and senior high level. A close knit faculty works well together.” Without common planning time it is difficult for teams to coordinate and function as a team. “We have done some interdisciplinary projects in the past it has not been a big focus here.” Cuts have led to former middle school teachers teaching high school classes, which has led to the elimination of scheduled common planning time. If teams lack common planning they often lack the time needed to function as a healthy team. They do not have time to discuss and plan interdisciplinary work, to create positive programs for students, or to identify and address the academic and emotional needs of students.

Walnut Hill performed very poorly in this area. Teams are established, but they do not function well. The biggest problem is a lack of common planning time. As result, teams do not hold regular meetings, form an agenda and send it out in advance, share instructional strategies, or coordinate curriculum during team meetings. During interviews, teachers shared that after-school activities have also been cut back. Walnut Hill earned a 1.7 rating on the survey and 1 on the interview. This is an area in need of improvement for Walnut Hill.

Walnut Hill – Classroom Instruction (4)

New York State Essential Element Four focuses on providing classroom instruction appropriate to the needs and characteristics of young adolescents by skilled and knowledgeable teachers. Element Four measures whether or not the instructional strategy used meets the needs of the learners in the classroom. Question 8 asks staff members from the four schools to rate the extent to which a visitor would observe the following instructional strategies on a typical day in their classroom as well as other classrooms around the building. Instructional strategies that are listed include whole class instruction, lecture, guided reading groups, inquiry based lab experiences, follow the directions lab experiences, cooperative groups, student to student discussion, literature circle/reading clubs, tiered assignments, differentiated assignments, student choices, peer tutoring, reading and/or writing workshops.

At Walnut Hill the most popular teaching strategies included lecture where 56% of respondents, or nine out of sixteen, felt that teachers use lecture and whole class instruction either all of the time or more than half the time in their classrooms. Fifty six percent of respondents, or eight out of fifteen, said they used cooperative groups, reader/writer workshop, and differentiated assignments. The less frequently used teaching strategies, peer tutoring and literature circles, were implemented either less than half the time or almost never according to 67%, or ten out of fifteen, of the respondents. There were also 60%, or nine out of fifteen, of respondents who selected student choices offered by teachers either less than half the time or almost never.

Question 9 asks respondents to please rate the extent to which they use each of the following approaches on typical assessments: demonstration, document based question, essay and written response, multiple choice, portfolio-based assessment, practicing format of state test, presentation, and project based. This question aligns with Essential Element Four and using

classroom assessments that are instructionally useful indicators of individual student growth and performance not only to monitor each student's progress in meeting the State's learning standards, but also to plan instruction.

Walnut Hill had 50%, or eight of sixteen, staff members almost always using demonstration, 31%, or five of sixteen, for essays and written response assessments, 27%, or four of sixteen, for presentations, and 17%, or two of sixteen, for project-based learning assessments. As indicated by the respondents the specific types of assessments that are almost never or never used include document-based questions at 25%, or four of sixteen and portfolio based assessments at 53%. Thirty-three percent said they never practice the format of state assessments. It is understandable that some subject matters align better with specific types of assessments. Walnut Hill applies a variety of assessments to varying degrees. The most popular assessment is multiple choice, with 57% using it more than half the time or almost always.

Survey question number 12 also provides evidence that aligns with NYS Essential Element Four. Which statement best describes the use of the NYS Learning Standards by the predominance of teachers in your school? Twenty-eight percent of all Walnut Hill teachers, or five of eighteen, begin all planning with the Standards. Another 39%, or seven out of eighteen, make adjustments to their lessons in order to align them with the Standards. Seventeen percent replied that teachers use pre-existing lessons and reference the standards. Still yet, another 11%, or two out of eighteen, replied that the Standards have little impact on planning or teaching and one person said the Standards have no impact on the school at all. The minority who want to ignore the Standards may be simply venting when they responded. However, this type of belief can become a hurdle to establishing a guaranteed, viable curriculum.

Teachers shared during interviews that there is enough professional development even though reductions have been made in this area the past few years. Teachers have rich, ongoing, training opportunities to continue to improve their instruction through the district and BOCES. One teacher said, “We’ve had a series of summer time opportunities to work on curriculum.” Some of these curriculum opportunities are to help teachers transition to the new Common Core ELA and math modules. Walnut Hill, like most schools in the area, relies on BOCES to provide professional development concerning the new Common Core modules. Walnut Hill earned a rating of 2 on both the survey and interview for NYS Essential Element Four. Teachers need to work collectively to ensure a guaranteed, viable curriculum. It is not acceptable to reject building wide initiatives, such as implementing the Learning Standards, because it denies students the opportunity to learn from the experience and creates gaps in student learning.

Walnut Hill – Educational Leadership (5)

In order to get staff members to buy in to and work together in a collective manner, schools need leaders who encourage, facilitate, and sustain involvement, participation, and partnerships. Element Five centers on the skills and characteristics of effective educational leaders. They must possess knowledge and understanding of the unique developmental needs of middle level students and use that knowledge to guide their decision making process. They must also be able to encourage, facilitate, and sustain participation in professional development involving the Standards and Common Core Curriculum.

Question 7 focuses on the extent that four statements describe the teaching staff in all four buildings. The four statements include: teachers are consistently caring and respectful in their interactions with students and adults, teachers have a deep understanding of their subject matter of different approaches to student learning and of diverse teaching techniques, teachers

provide instruction that is consistently standards based, challenging, rigorous, and purposeful, and teachers thoroughly know and understand the needs and developmental characteristics of young adolescents. Staff members are able to select from all or almost all of the staff, more than half the staff, approximately half the staff, less than half the staff, none or very few of the staff. It measures Element Five, which focuses on the ability of administration to know and understand the varying needs of middle age students as well as the ability to help the staff meet those needs.

At Walnut Hill fourteen of seventeen, or 82%, of respondents felt that all or almost all of the teachers are consistently caring and respectful in their interactions. Seven of seventeen, or 41% felt all or almost all teachers have a deep understanding of their subject matter. Another six, or 35%, felt more than half have a deep understanding of their subject matter. Eight of seventeen felt all or almost all teachers and six of seventeen felt more than half the teachers have a deep understanding of their subject matter. Six of sixteen, or 38%, felt all or almost all teachers have a thorough understanding of the needs and developmental characteristics of students, and five of sixteen, or 31%, felt more than half thoroughly understood the needs and characteristics of students. Only one out of sixteen staff members said that none or very few teachers thoroughly understood the needs and characteristics of young adolescents.

Question 16 asks respondents to describe the extent of academic and personal support available for students. Categories include, adults and older youth serve as positive role models, positive behaviors are recognized and affirmed, respect and caring engender a feeling of self-worth, self-confidence, and personal efficacy among students, staff and students have opportunities to examine, explore, discuss, and understand the changes associated with early adolescence, counseling and guidance services assist students in making life, career, and educational choices, a network of trained professionals, special programs, and community

resources are available to assist those who have extraordinary needs and require additional services, and an adult mentor is available to students either formally through a teacher/student, advisor/advisee program or informally through a school culture of caring in which teachers or other adults assume responsibility for individual students. The range of selections available to choose from are conclusive, extensive, considerable, some evidence, minimal evidence, trace evidence, and no evidence. The question is designed to gather evidence related to the network of academic and personal support that is available for all students.

Walnut Hill gave itself strong ratings in several areas while a few categories earned weak ratings. Three of fifteen, or 20%, felt there is conclusive evidence that adults and older students served as mentors, another four of fifteen, or 27%, felt positive behaviors are recognized and affirmed and twelve of fifteen, or 80%, felt there is conclusive, extensive, or considerable evidence in both areas. Seventy-three percent, or eleven of fifteen, felt there is conclusive, extensive, or considerable evidence that respect and caring engender a feeling of self-worth and confidence in students and 86 % or, thirteen of fifteen, felt there are counseling and guidance services to assist students in making life, career, and educational choices. On the other hand, seven of fourteen, or 50 percent, felt there is minimal, a trace or no evidence that an adult mentor is available to students either formally or informally and another 46%, or seven out of fifteen, felt that there is a minimal or trace evidence that staff and students have opportunities to understand the changes related to early adolescence. Overall, a majority of respondents felt there was conclusive, extensive or conclusive evidence for five of the seven categories.

During interviews, teachers shared that Principals support meeting the needs of students through Response to Intervention and Academic Intervention Support. However, staff also shared that Principals have not recognized the unique needs of middle school students. “We

don't have a really defined middle school there is a real difference between middle, elementary and high school.” When staff members are not taught about the unique needs of middle school age students, schools often lack the programs that help meet the needs. For example, a variety of programs that cater to a variety of interests are needed to connect students in positive ways with their classmates, teachers, administration, and school. Organizations that understand how important it is to meet the needs of middle grade students and to be part of a team may be more likely to invest time and money into these programs instead of cutting them. Teachers disapproved of the lack of a character education program at their school. “Staff members work to teach appropriate social skills, but the staff is critical to point out that there is not a character education program in place.” Schools create gaps when they eliminate programs that help meet the needs of students. Walnut Hill administration also made cuts that resulted in a loss of teaming. If they were focused on implementing the NYS Essential Elements, would they have made the same decision to sacrifice common team planning? They may have, but only if there were no other viable options. The gaps in meeting their students’ social and emotional needs traces back to lacking a clear understanding of the importance of the NYS Essential Elements and how they positively impact students and student learning when they are applied to a high degree.

Administration is knowledgeable of the NYS Essential Elements, but they have not provided formal training for the entire staff. The educational leaders are well trained and have done extensive work on curriculum and technology integration. Walnut Hill earned a rating of 2 on the survey and 2 for the interview. Walnut Hill implements the NYS Essential Element Five to a moderate degree.

Walnut Hill – Academic and Personal Support (6)

Essential Element Six focuses on whether or not a network of academic and personal support is available for all students. To what extent would the staff commit to each statement as a responsibility of your school? Question 4 aligns primarily with Essential Element Six and the research concludes that adolescents in general need access to a system that supports both academic achievement and personal development in order to be successful in school. Walnut Hill respondents believed that more than half the staff accepts responsibility for the academic and personal development of students. Eighty-two percent felt that more than half the staff contribute to connecting students with their school, 83% develop the whole child, and 94% believed more than half the staff at Walnut Hill ensure a safe, trusting learning environment for all students. Another 73% said that more than half the staff, provide their students with a variety of learning experiences and 76% believe that more than half the staff provide successful transitions as students move from elementary to middle to high school.

Survey question 10, asks respondents from each school to rate how they use each communication strategy with parents and families. The rating scale includes almost always, more than half the time, half the time, less than half the time, and almost never. The communication strategies include school wide report cards, occasionally written progress reports, regular written progress reports, student led conferences, phone calls home, parent teacher conferences, school wide progress reports, a web based system with home access to student information, and parent team conferences. Question 10 aligns with Essential Element Six because it relates to schools having a process for informing parents, families, and community groups of the essential role they play in ensuring student success.

At Walnut Hill 88%, or fourteen of sixteen, respondents claimed to use a web based system with home access to communicate with parents nearly all of the time. Eighty-one

percent, or thirteen of sixteen, respondents selected comments on school wide report cards as almost always used when communicating with parents. Analysis of the results reveal a number of items where nearly one-third of respondents selected almost always used and a similar number of respondents selected almost never used. When asked if written regular progress reports are used, four respondents said almost always and another five said almost never. Four of sixteen said they almost always use parent teacher conferences and three of sixteen felt they are almost never used. Five of sixteen respondents felt school wide progress reports are almost always used to communicate to parents and another five felt they are almost never used to communicate with parents. Parent teacher conferences are essential in the middle grades and should always be used; however, three out of sixteen respondents selected almost never for the category.

Overall, a majority, or nine of the sixteen respondents felt the school used one of the eight strategies more than half of the time or almost always used four times in only two categories. These forms of communication were school wide report cards and a web based system with home access. A majority also felt that the school used one of the eight strategies less than half the time or almost never for three out of the nine categories and eight respondents selected almost never for another three categories. Thirteen of sixteen, or 81%, felt they almost never used student led conferences. Another thirteen, or 81%, felt phone calls home that are not for disciplinary reasons occurred less than half the time. Finally, ten respondents felt occasionally written progress reports occurred less than half the time or almost never.

Question 11 asks respondents to rate their school in the areas of conclusive evidence, extensive evidence, considerable evidence, some evidence, minimal evidence, trace evidence, and no evidence. Respondents assessed their school in several areas including connecting each adolescent with the school in a positive manner, a structure to create close, sustained

relationships, teacher teams that are responsible for a group of students, a school culture of mutual support and collective responsibility for each student, counseling and guidance services, planning collaboratively and providing staff development opportunities, and emphasis of personal development. Question 11 aligns closest with Essential Element Six emphasizing a network of academic and personal support for all students.

Walnut Hill has seven out of fifteen, or 47%, of respondents who felt there is conclusive evidence of counseling and guidance services to assist students in making life, career and educational decisions. Another 33%, or five out of fifteen, believed there is conclusive evidence of creating and sustaining a culture of support for the educational and personal development of every student, and collaboration and planning staff development opportunities. A majority of respondents, or eight out of fifteen, felt there was considerable, extensive or conclusive evidence for six of the seven areas. The only area that did not make the cut was the ability of teacher teams to take responsibility for the personal and social development of each student. Even in this area, 33% of respondents believed there is some evidence of teacher teams taking responsibility for developing students both personally and socially. However, another 27%, or four out of fifteen staff responded by selecting only a trace or no evidence of teacher teams taking responsibility for the development of students. Another 20% felt there is a trace or no evidence of collaboratively planning staff development opportunities.

During interviews, most staff members believed they met the academic and personal needs of students. However, there was a minority that felt differently. Some of the positive comments mentioned in favor of Walnut Hill meeting the needs of students were, “We definitely have the counselors available for several students who see them on a regular basis.” Another staff member said, “RTI is in, if we want to get someone into Academic Intervention, if we can

get them in to receive the academic services we know we can solve the problem before it becomes an official problem, parents are well informed and bullying is always handled immediately.” These comments contribute to supporting the establishment of an environment that values both academic and personal needs. On the other hand, the following comments were also made, “I am not going to call home if a child is failing I would rather have that oh no, I got a 36, on my report card rather than I would holding hands, for self-management, for them to learn a lesson now.” Another teacher said, “I am not a phone call person.” These statements work against a culture that focuses on meeting the varying academic and personal needs of students. Walnut Hill made financial decisions that led to very few after school opportunities for students. It also led to assigning middle school teachers to teach high school courses, which led to middle grade teams losing their common planning time. Walnut Hill earned a moderate rating of 1.8 on the survey questions and a rating of 2 on the interview for NYS Essential Element Six.

Walnut Hill – Professional Development (7)

Question 17 in the survey aligns with NYS Essential Element Seven: Professional learning and staff development for all staff that is ongoing, planned, purposeful, and collaboratively developed. There are five categories that include principals and teachers knowing the needs and characteristics of middle level students, varying instructional strategies to help students learn, staff have high expectations for all students, teachers have opportunities to learn about and understand their subject matter, teachers participate in staff development opportunities, and the school has taken a proactive approach in providing training in the Common Core. The selections are conclusive, extensive, considerable, some evidence, minimal evidence, trace evidence, and no evidence. The question aligns with Essential Element Seven because they both measure the degree that professional learning and staff development for all

staff is ongoing, planned, purposeful, and collaboratively developed. A range of nine to fifteen out of fifteen respondents felt there is conclusive, extensive, or considerable evidence that Walnut Hill provides training so that principals and teachers know the needs and characteristics of middle level students along with instructional strategies that help these students, staff have high expectations for all students, teachers have opportunities to learn about and understand their subject matter, teachers participate in staff development opportunities, and the school has taken a proactive approach in providing training in the Common Core. However, the school does have six of fifteen respondents, or 38%, who felt the school has minimal or no evidence to show they have taken a proactive approach to provide training for the Common Core. Walnut Hill, along with many schools in the region, have provided about the same degree of training. Because it is new, professional training to prepare for the Common Core may increase in the near future.

Interviews reveal that professional development is abundant; however, the type of training is a concern for some teachers. “Professional development is lacking. We spend a lot of money on technology development but that only gets you so far. I have had a single, one hour presentation, that wasn’t technology related this year.” Both the survey and interview indicate that teachers felt the need for greater emphasis on meeting the social and emotional needs of students. It appears that the staff is aware of the need for a greater balance between the focus on technology and new curricular initiatives and ways to meet the social and emotional needs of students. Since several teachers had described staff development as being abundant and ongoing, this would likely not be a problem. “Walnut Hill offers ongoing professional development in a variety of areas through BOCES including Common Core, integration of technology in the classroom, and literacy.” Walnut Hill needs to add more training and programs to better balance their focus on meeting both the academic and emotional needs of

students. Training in the NYS Essential Elements and adding an advisor/advisee time to address character education would balance their focus. NYSED, the press, and politicians pressure the schools to increase student achievement on tests. Schools need to realize that one way to increase student achievement is to focus on providing a balance of programs to meet the varied needs of students. Walnut Hill earned a rating of 2 for both the survey and interview. This indicates that Walnut Hill implemented NYS Essential Element Seven to a moderate degree.

4. How does Walnut Hill balance meeting the social, emotional, academic and intellectual needs' of all students?

When it comes to providing a structure of academic and personal support for students, teaming is at the heart of it. At Walnut Hill, teams in grades 5 and 6 have common planning, but teams in grades 7 and 8 do not. Interviews also reveal that 7th and 8th grade teams rarely meet as a team, work together on interdisciplinary projects, or use an agenda for their meetings. Walnut Hill rated a 1.7 on the survey results and a 1 from the interviews. Budget cuts hampered the ability to afford teaming. The Principal shared that teachers who once taught only 7th and 8th grade now have to pick up a few sections of high school courses after cuts were made to these departments.

Even though they were not very familiar with the NYS Essential Elements, Walnut Hill's staff felt strongly about implementing several best practices and that their philosophy in the middle grades was to meet the varying academic and social needs of students. For NYS Essential Element One, having a philosophy that believes in providing a safe, caring community that develops the whole child, Walnut Hill received a rating of 3 on both the interview and survey. They rated a one for the degree of implementation of NYS Essential Element Two, which requires the education program to be relevant, rigorous, challenging, purposeful, and

standards based. The question asks respondents to what degree character traits were a focus of the school, a majority of teachers responded by saying character traits were less of a focus in the school. Respondents felt the school needed to increase their focus to promote positive character traits. Staff members also felt the after school program was lacking. “I don’t think there is much as far as after school, after school programs have been proposed and turned down to run after school clubs.” Middle school students, who come home to an empty house because the parents are working, are more likely to experiment with sex, drugs, and alcohol during this time after school more than any other time. For high school students the time for experimentation occurs at night during weekends. Therefore, eliminating after school programs may be detrimental to a district’s middle level students.

The lack of transition plans for sixth graders going into the secondary building and a lack of focus on middle school in general concerned staff members. “We really don’t have a defined middle school,” replied one of the teachers. This evidence suggests that while Walnut Hill provides a wealth of professional development for staff members, they may be lacking in their understanding middle level students’ need and how to address meeting these needs. Schools that face financial pressures and do not have a thorough understanding of the NYS Essential Elements may be more likely to eliminate common planning time or after school programming since they may not be aware of what they are giving up. In New York State, schools that perform poorly on standardized tests may be identified as SINI schools, or schools in need of improvement. Recommendations from the New York State Education Department focus primarily on curriculum and instructional strategies without addressing the social and emotional needs of students. Schools must address the whole child when meeting their needs if they are to be successful. Students living in poverty may not have all their needs met at home. The

responsibility often falls to the schools to try to meet these needs as best as they can. Applying the New York State Essential Elements is not simply a luxury provided only in wealthier schools. Every school in New York State must have the opportunity to apply the Essential Elements in order to provide a supportive learning environment for students.

Respondents were also asked to what extent staff members would be responsible for the academic and personal success of students. A high percentage of staff members who responded felt staff members connect students to their school and created a safe, trusting learning environment for all students. A majority of staff also felt they support a successful transition for all students from elementary to middle school to high school. During the interviews, respondents talked about doing a lot of work on the Common Core. The staff lacked in teaching the Common Core with consistency and understanding, but their efforts were just beginning. They received a rating of 2 for Essential Element Two.

Walnut Hill teachers have had many professional development opportunities to learn about instructional strategies. The most popular instructional strategies are the traditional lecture and whole group instruction along with cooperative reading groups, reader/writer workshop, and differentiated assignments. Teachers have also been introduced to a variety of assessments. A majority uses multiple choice questions, demonstration, questions on tests that are in the same format as the state test, and portfolio based assessments. Interdisciplinary work did not occur frequently according to respondents during interviews. Walnut Hill received a rating of 2 for NYS Essential Element Four.

The educational leaders and Principals at Walnut Hill are well trained in curriculum work and technology. Administration at Walnut Hill puts students first and tries to meet the varying needs of students whenever they feel it is possible. Administration encourages staff to attend

BOCES trainings. NYS Essential Element Five measures whether administrators are able to lead their staff by encouraging, facilitating, and sustaining partnerships and participation. NYS Essential Element Six focuses on a network of academic, social and emotional support for students who need it. Walnut Hill staff rated themselves very high and claimed all or almost all teachers care for and understand the needs of the students. RtI and AIS are in place and working to meet the academic needs of students. Partnering with parents is another way to provide a network of support for students. When asked how they communicated with parents, one-third of the respondents said they almost never communicated with parents. Respondents had different opinions when asked if there was enough counseling support for students in the survey. A majority felt there was conclusive evidence that counseling programs provide enough support for students.

During the interviews, respondents felt strongly that counseling services adequately supported students. Twenty-five percent of all respondents felt there was only a trace or no evidence that teacher teams take responsibility for the development of all students. During the interviews, some staff members revealed a negative attitude toward calling parents at home. They felt they may be doing too much for students and resented being made to feel that they had to serve as a parent as well as a teacher. This was not true of most staff, but it does provide insight into the varied responses regarding NYS Essential Element Six. The inconsistency in responses reveals that not all of the staff agrees that the school and all teachers need to provide both academic and personal support.

Walnut Hill provides a significant amount of professional development opportunities. Ongoing, planned, and purposeful professional development measures the degree of implementation of NYS Essential Element Seven. Professional development includes

continuous individual and small group trainings about research based practices. Some of these research-based practices align with the NYS Essential Elements. BOCES provides a variety of excellent learning opportunities for staff members. Walnut Hill received ratings of 2 for both the survey and interview for Element Seven.

5. What obstacles did Walnut Hill face when trying to implement the NYS Essential Elements? What can be done to overcome these hurdles?

The staff was not very familiar with the NYS Essential Elements or middle grade best practices. The Principal rated the staff at 1 in the understanding and application the NYS Essential Elements. While there has been a substantial amount of quality professional development on technology and instructional strategies, there has been little emphasis on the NYS Essential Elements or middle grade philosophy. Walnut Hill would benefit from working to implement further the NYS Essential Elements across middle grades and use the rubrics to measure their progress. Although not very familiar with the middle grade philosophy, Walnut Hill staff has trained in research-based programs such as Capturing Kids Hearts and they have integrated technology into their classrooms. Most staff understands they need to meet the varying needs of their students in order for them to be successful.

In years past, inadequate funding has been an issue for Walnut Hill and every other school district in Western New York. Staff members commented on financial concerns negatively impacting the school. “Cuts have hurt when we lost a math remediation, foreign Language, and reading teacher remediation positions. General education teachers had to take on more of a role providing interventions.” Another staff member commented that, “money is something that doesn’t abound.” Walnut Hill had to make difficult financial decisions that led to the break up of teams and the elimination of common planning time at 7th and 8th grade.

A few staff members also disagreed on whether or not they were responsible to meet the academic, intellectual, social, and emotional needs of all students. This was evident in one of the interviews when a teacher shared, “I purposefully, am not a phone call guy. Unless it is something that you really need to be involved in, I am not going to call home. If a child is failing, I would rather have that, oh no, I got a 36 on my report card! Rather than holding hands, I’m for self-management, for them to learn a lesson now.” This position is contrary to the middle grade level philosophy that because students will make mistakes it is best to partner with parents early on. Any amount of this attitude serves as a hurdle to implementing the NYS Essential Elements to a high degree.

6. What is the relationship for Walnut Hill between the degree of implementation of the NYS Essential Elements and student achievement?

From 2010-2012, Walnut Hill had 75% of all students scoring at level 3 or 4 on the NYS 8th grade ELA test in comparison to 49% of students in New York State scoring at levels 3 or 4. In math, Walnut Hill had 50% of students scoring at level 3 or 4 in comparison to the state moderate of 59% of all students scoring at level 3 or 4 on the NYS 8th grade math test. Levels 3 and 4 are considered to indicate the student is on track to be both college and career ready. Walnut Hill implemented the NYS Essential Elements to a moderate degree scoring 2.07 and 2.0 out of 3.0 on both the survey and interview.

Pine Hill Overview

1. What are the demographics for Pine Hill School?

Pine Hill is located in the Southern Tier of Western New York and has between 950-1050 students with the moderate graduating class between 75-85 students. Middle level grades 5-8 are located in the same section of a building that houses students in grades 5-12. There is a separate

Principal for these grades and another Principal for both grades K-4 and 9-12. The current Principal has been there for more than eight years. There are between, 40-50% of the students receiving free and reduced lunch. Class sizes vary between 12-20 students. The suspension rate is between 4-8% although there is one year in which the suspension rate was around 15%. The attendance rate is around 92-96%.

Using a scale of 1-3 to rate the knowledge of middle grade education, with 1 being below moderate, 2 being moderate and 3 being above moderate, the Principal self rated knowledge of middle grade philosophy as a 3 and rated staff knowledge as a 2. This school has received some training on the NYS Essential Elements by attending the NYSMSA Conferences and learning about the NYS Essential Elements during professional development days and faculty meetings. Pine Hill, like the other three schools in the study, has a mission and philosophy that focuses on meeting the academic, social, emotional needs of students. This is not surprising since they have focused on implementing the NYS Essential Elements over the years.

2. How are the middle school grades at Pine Hill organized? Is the organization configured to support a high degree of implementation of the NYS Essential Elements?

Pine Hill administration has knowledge of research-based practices and the NYS Essential Elements and has a Middle School Principal for grades 5-7. Since the district recognizes the need to focus on the middle grades by assigning a Middle School Principal it is not surprising the staff has focused on training with the NYS Essential Elements. It is not possible for every small school district to assign an administrator to the middle grades. If the district cannot, they must be sure not to let the middle grades become lost. This tends to happen

when decisions are made based on what is best for elementary and high school students while forgetting to think about the specific needs of students in the middle grades.

Pine Hill does have teaming across grades 5-8. However, there is a problem. Teachers in grades 5/6 cannot meet together for team planning during the day. Budget cuts required that teachers who at one time taught only on team, be assigned to teach classes at other grade levels which made team planning impossible. Interesting enough, in other schools, grades 7/8 could not meet as a team, but in Pine Hill, it is grades 5/6. Grade 6 does not have a daily team meeting time and grade 5 cannot meet because they must provide coverage for other classes. Pine Hill received high ratings on teaming and having an organization that is reflective of the middle grade philosophy on the survey. However, during the interviews it became clear that not every grade level meets as a team so they earned a 2 rating on their degree of implementation for NYS Essential Element Three. The administration is knowledgeable of the NYS Essential Elements and the unique needs of middle school students and yet they felt compelled to make cuts to staff that led to grades 5 and 6 not being able to meet as a team.

3. To what degree do the schools implement the NYS Essential Elements based on both the survey and interview results? How do the survey and interview measures compare to each other? Why do or don't schools implement best practices that align with the NYS Essential Elements?

Using data from both the survey and the interviews each school will receive a rating from 1-3 based on the degree in which they implement the NYS Essential Elements. This next section will share survey and interview data collected on each of the Seven NYS Essential Elements.

Pine Hill – Philosophy and Mission (1)

Question 1 simply asks participants if they want to participate. Survey question number 2 centers on the school mission statement and whether it explicitly references both the academic and personal needs of children. Question two measures Essential Element One, which centers on each school having a philosophy and mission that reflects the intellectual and developmental needs of students. Pine Hill's mission statement does reflect the importance of meeting the academic and personal needs of all students. Teams play a significant role when it comes to meeting the needs of students. "Team meetings are used to address issues in the classroom, not just the academic standpoint, they talk about the social needs of kids and they come to us to get our help." Pine Hill also has an after-school program that includes a separate bus run to remove the hurdle of transportation for students who stay after. Sometimes the neediest students have no transportation if the school cannot provide it. One teacher spoke about the after-school program. "There are a lot of clubs after school, teachers will stay if a child asks them to, there is a late bus run at 4 o'clock and 5 o'clock." Academic support is provided as well. "AIS is mandated and we invite kids to attend even if they are not in need of AIS, but need help." Pine Hill provides multiple means for students to receive academic support both during the day and after school. Pine Hill earned a rating of 3 for both the survey and interview.

Pine Hill – Educational Program (2)

Question 3 on the survey aligns with NYS Essential Element Two. How much are these characteristics a focus for your school as a whole? The characteristics include academic, social, ethical, physical, and emotional needs of students. Respondents can choose from exclusive, primary, or less of a focus for each characteristic. This Essential Element focuses on schools having an educational program that is challenging and standards-based, as well as comprehensive, integrated, and relevant. Pine Hill had nearly

half of all respondents, or three out of seven, select less of a focus for the areas of social, ethical, and physical while no one selected academic as less of a focus. This indicates that the respondents believe there is not enough of a focus on social, ethical, and physical characteristics.

Survey question number five describes the extent of implementation a visitor would observe on any given day for a list of qualities. The items listed focus on measuring the degree to which the educational program is comprehensive, challenging, purposeful, integrated, relevant, and standards-based. These are all characteristics that make up NYS Essential Element Two. Specific qualities include common expectations for writing, literacy, and numeracy across all disciplines, the use of data and benchmark assessments to monitor learning and adapt instruction, engagement of the family and local community in the personal development of students, as well as a program that is challenging, rigorous, and purposeful. In Pine Hill's response to question 5, nine out of the eleven respondents felt the qualities would not be observed almost all of the time. Only one out of seven felt there are consistent expectations for math, writing, and literacy. The same number of respondents believed they use benchmark assessments to monitor student learning. Forty-two percent, or three out of seven, respondents felt less than half of the academic program is geared around offering opportunities for the development of personal responsibility and self-direction. Another 43% felt that less than half of the academic program is explicitly articulated vertically and horizontally, within and across the various curricular areas, learning standards, and grade levels. On the positive side, 71% or, five of seven, respondents believed a visitor would observe, more than half the time, the program providing targeted and timely academic intervention

services that are based upon a careful assessment of the academic, social, and emotional needs of students at risk of not meeting the State's learning standards. Fifty-seven percent, or four out of seven, respondents felt the program is challenging, rigorous, and purposeful.

During interviews, staff members spoke most positively about receiving the necessary training to provide the rigorous, challenging curriculum that the Common Core Standards require. "Professional development is really supportive especially the last five years it has been more teacher directed, in that way it has become more meaningful to teachers." Most recently, the focus has been on making the shifts to apply the new Common Core. One teacher commented on Common Core training and how the ELA and math departments worked together. "The modules are given high priority because they require so much training. We have a tight department where ELA and math work together." Another teacher felt professional development was meaningful and relevant, "Professional, development is really supportive, especially the last five years. It has been more teacher directed, in that way, it has become more meaningful to teachers. You gain information you can actually use in your classroom." Another teacher commented on administrative support to learn and grow as a teacher. "Administrators are always encouraging us to go out to webinars or go to BOCES or check out programs in other schools." These comments all indicate administration and teachers are working together to provide and participate in continuous, ongoing learning that is relevant and meaningful.

However, other staff members tell a different story. One of the concerns raised was that administration provides adequate professional development, but does not follow

through to make sure changes are made to the instructional program within the classroom. “There is mandated training at the beginning of the year. After that, it is up to us as to what staff development opportunities we want to take.” Choice can be a good thing for teachers and students as long as there are common expectations that everyone must meet in order to provide a guaranteed, viable curriculum. One teacher spoke from personal experience about applying professional development initiatives, “I never really fully buy in, you will see bits and pieces.” Another staff member commented, “Teachers do what they want in middle school it is a mess, huge gaps and holes and identified gaps we have been working toward that.” These comments raise questions about whether or not teachers understand the importance of providing a guaranteed, viable curriculum to all students.

During interviews, teachers spoke about how much they like that administration has supported them to make changes, but has not forced changes on them. A supportive approach works if the teachers accept their professional responsibility to learn and grow with the organization by making the changes in the classroom to benefit the students. The evidence above indicates that it may be time for teachers to further embrace their professional responsibility to learn and grow together. Administration may also need to focus on establishing and following up on expectations that can be measured to hold everyone accountable for making the curriculum or instructional changes that are being embraced by the district. The staff is weak in their ability to implement this Element. Pine Hill earned a 1.7 rating on the survey and a 1 rating on the interview. This is an area in need of improvement.

Pine Hill – Organization and Structure (3)

Having an organization and structure that supports both academic excellence and personal development describes NYS Essential Element Three. Question 6 asks staff members to rate the extent to which the regular work of the interdisciplinary teams agrees with a list of nine different statements. The eight statements include agenda use for meetings, focus on curriculum and instruction, common strategies and expectations, special events for students, focus on student behavior, the social and emotional needs of students, coordinated curriculum and assignments, and common planning time opportunities. How teams work together and function provides insight into the degree Pine Hill implements this Essential Element. The results are mixed. Fifty-seven percent, or four of seven, agreed that they talk about curriculum and instruction more than half the time and 71%, or five of seven, answered that they have common planning time and use it to discuss the behavior of students more than half the time. There are also 29% who said they use an agenda less than half the time, 43% said they plan special events less than half the time, and 29% said they coordinate assignments and assessments less than half the time. The results indicate Pine Hill teams spend a majority of their time discussing student behaviors in comparison to coordinated assignments and assessments. Discussing student behaviors is something all teams do. The question is whether teams are discussing behaviors frequently because they are working on programs to increase positive student behaviors or are merely venting about negative student behaviors without solutions. Teachers shared the following evidence during interviews, “We come together as a team to address struggling students and what teachers are doing to deal with these problems.” Another staff member shared, “We put out fires during this time, we discuss interventions and referrals to support students.” Evidence indicates that when discussing behaviors there is a focus on solutions. Another teacher indicated that it is an expectation that coordinating curriculum and

assessments be discussed during team meetings and that they were required to turn in agendas to administration at the end of the meeting. The feedback received from staff indicated that the Pine Hill Administrative team has done a good job setting expectations for common team planning time. Teams need to monitor themselves and spend more time discussing ways to coordinate the curriculum, assessments, and special programs to meet student needs. They must also avoid venting without solutions while discussing student behavior.

Survey question 13 asks participants to rate the extent of student participation in the following programs in their school. The school programs measured include extracurricular athletics at the modified level for 7th and 8th graders, clubs, informal after school help with teachers, formal after school counseling programs, academic intervention services (AIS), and coordinated service learning opportunities. The scale that records the degree of participation includes almost all students, more than half the students, approximately half the students, less than half the students, and a few students. No respondents marked almost all students participate for any of the programs. Two out of seven, or 29%, chose more than half of the students participate in modified sports. Approximately half the students participate was selected by 57% for modified sports and clubs, 29% for coordinated service learning opportunities, and 14% or, 1 of seven, replied that half the students attend both formal and informal after school programs to support students. The category of few students participate was widely selected with 71%, or five of seven, for informal after school help with teachers, another 43%, or three out of seven, for AIS, formal after school programs, and coordinated service learning after school programs. It appears that very few programs are run after school. Interviews will help shed more light on the after school programs.

Does your school have interdisciplinary teams? Question number 14 is one of the few yes/no questions in the survey. Interdisciplinary teams are essential to a school creating a close, supportive environment. They are also critical for a school trying to meet the academic, intellectual, social, and emotional needs of students. This question aligns most closely with Essential Element Three, specifically Element 3.1. This Element states that teacher teams need to share responsibility for the education and personal development of a common group of students. Six of seven, or 87%, said yes they do have interdisciplinary teams and 13% said no.

In a typical week, how often do your interdisciplinary teams meet? Choices for question 15 range from five times a week down to teams who do not meet at all. Different grade levels can meet a different number of times based on the master schedule and the assignments of the teachers. Question 15 aligns most closely with Essential Element Three. Thirty-three percent, or two of six, respondents selected five times, four times, and three times to answer the number of times teams meet a week. The number of times teams meet varies from daily for grades seven and eight to not meeting regularly for grade five and six due to a lack of common planning time.

Interviews revealed a lot about the after school program, teaming and how it is conducted at Pine Hill. After school, is a time when grades 5 and 6 keep students after school for additional academic support. Some teachers in grades 7-12 stay after school with students while others do not. One grade five/six teacher said, “We target kids who don’t have values at home and they are in homework club every day. We are doing what may not be happening at home.” If the goal is to help the student be successful teams must provide a structured time after school to help the student complete their homework on a daily basis. Another teacher shared that teachers are available after school, “It is really up to them to set up times with students, but the teachers are available for extra help.” Transportation is also provided for students after school. This is

important in a rural district that is around 200 square miles large. Not offering bus transportation to students staying after school would make it difficult for working parents to allow their children to participate in after-school activities. “Mom and dad simply can’t get away from farm or can’t get out of work late so having the bus transport the student helps kids stay after.” Providing opportunities for students to attend after school is critical to finding time to meet the needs of some students. It is not unusual for students struggling academically to also struggle socially and emotionally. To meet all of these needs districts should run after school support programs and provide transportation home for all participating students. Providing transportation is important for many of the rural districts in Western New York who may appear to be small in population but are large in area as measured by square miles. Some residents live up to 30 minutes away from their school in many districts. High poverty rates also mean that some parents do not have a vehicle at home so students cannot participate in after school activities. District transportation levels the playing field and allows these students to attend when they could otherwise not. Pine Hill is to be commended for offering after school programs and school transportation.

Pine Hill approaches teaming differently depending on the grade level. One teacher shared, “grades 5 and 6 have teams but not common team planning. Grades 7 and 8 meet daily as a team.” Staff members do understand the benefits of teaming. One teacher shared, “I use team planning to discuss curriculum.” Another teacher shared, “We come together daily to deal with problems together.” Teachers also call parents or meet with parents during team time. “Building administration values team planning time that is scheduled and works to protect it from disruptions.” However, difficult choices made by district administration to cut personnel in the budget, have made it problematic to schedule team planning when teachers are needed to

teach other subject areas off team. Grade 5 and 6 teachers do meet on special occasions, but it does not occur at a regularly scheduled time, which is needed to deal with problems when they occur. Losing common planning time does not allow the team to function as a team. Teams are not able to develop programs or strategies to address the needs of students collectively. The problems do not go away, but the primary mechanism to resolve the problems does go away if teams do not meet on their own. Both grades 5 and 6 met only sporadically after personnel cuts eliminated team planning. Pine Hill earned a 1.5 rating on the survey and a 2 rating on the interview. Both indicate a moderate to below moderate implementation of NYS Essential Element Three. Pine Hill suffers because grades five and six do not have common planning time. The concept of teaming is not complete if team teachers are unable to meet regularly to plan and dialogue about the needs of their students.

Pine Hill – Classroom Instruction (4)

Question 8 asks staff members from the four schools to rate the extent to which a visitor would observe the following instructional strategies on a typical day in their classroom as well as other classrooms around the building. The instructional strategies are whole class instruction, lecture, guided reading groups, inquiry based lab experiences, follow the directions lab experiences, cooperative groups, student-to-student discussion, literature circle/reading clubs, tiered assignments, differentiated assignments, student choices, peer tutoring, and reading and/or writing workshops. Element Four measures whether or not the instructional strategy used meets the needs of the learners in the classroom.

At Pine Hill, 33% of respondents, or two out of six, selected whole group instruction as the only instruction that is almost always used during a typical day. Another 57%, or four out of seven, felt cooperative groups are used more than half the time and 43%, or three out of seven,

respondents felt student choice and peer tutoring are used more than half the time. Eighty five percent of staff members felt assignments are differentiated half the time. Another 57% of respondents, or four out of seven, felt teachers never conduct follow the directions lab experiments and 42%, or three out of seven, respondents felt teachers never applied literature circles. Due to the fact that a variety of strategies are selected as being used part of the time Pine Hill has a moderate rating when it comes to measuring the degree of implementation of Essential Element Six.

Question 9 asks respondents to please rate the extent to which they use each of these approaches on typical assessments; demonstration, document based question, essay and written response, multiple choice, portfolio-based assessment, state test practice format, presentation, and project-based. This question aligns with Essential Element Four and using classroom assessments that are instructionally useful indicators of individual student growth and performance not only to monitor each student's progress in meeting the State's learning standards, but also to plan instruction.

Eighty-three percent, or five out of six, Pine Hill respondents said they use essays as a form of evaluation more than half the time, 33%, or two out of six, use assessments involving demonstration, portfolio-based assessments, state test format assessments, and project-based assessments more than half the time. What forms of assessment are never used? Only 17% of respondents said they never or almost never use demonstration, portfolio-based assessments, or practice the format of the state test. The most popular forms of assessment chosen are essays and written response with 83% using them more than half the time. The least popular assessment used is portfolio-based assessment with 50 % using it less than half the time and another 17%

almost never using it. The other assessments did not have any respondents select never or almost never.

Which statement best describes the use of the NYS Learning Standards by the predominance of teachers in your school? Survey question 12 measures the degree schools implement the NYS Learning Standards. Essential Element Four states that staff need to know and understand each of the State's 28 learning standards. Sixty-seven percent, or four out of six, teachers said they make adjustments to their lessons in order to align them with the Standards. The other 33%, or four out of six, said they begin all planning with the Standards.

Interview results reveal that Pine Hill offers teachers plenty of professional development opportunities to learn a variety of instructional strategies. The concern is whether teachers use a variety of strategies and assessments to meet the varying needs of students. One teacher said, “Our problems are developing and implementing the new Common Core Curriculum.” Survey results indicate that some teachers do not vary their instruction or assessments regularly to meet the varying needs of students. One teacher mentioned having collegial circles during interviews. Faculty members came together to discuss common issues including curriculum concerns. One teacher explained it by saying, “We investigate the dilemma, compare notes and work to resolve the problem.” The faculty has established a process for working through issues and concerns. Some teachers are implementing new instructional strategies and assessments to meet the needs of students. Pine Hill received a moderate rating in this area and earned a 2.3 rating on the survey and 2.0 rating for the interview.

Pine Hill – Educational Leadership (5)

Effective educational leaders must possess knowledge and understanding of the unique developmental needs of middle level students and use that knowledge to guide their decision

making process. They must also be able to encourage, facilitate, and sustain participation in professional development involving the Standards and Common Core Curriculum. This is also the definition of NYS Essential Element Five. Pine Hill offers a wealth of professional development and they have a strong leader who knows the NYSMSA Essential Elements and how they benefit students.

Question 7 focuses on the extent that four statements describe the teaching staff in all four buildings. The four statements include teachers are consistently caring and respectful in their interactions with students and adults, teachers have a deep understanding of their subject matter of different approaches to student learning and of diverse teaching techniques, teachers provide instruction that is consistently standards based, challenging, rigorous, and purposeful, and teachers thoroughly know and understand the needs and developmental characteristics of young adolescents. Staff members are able to select from all or almost all of the staff, more than half the staff, approximately half the staff, less than half the staff, and none or very few of the staff. It measures Element Five and the ability of educational leaders to know the varying social and emotional needs of students and be able to lead the staff to meet these needs.

Pine Hill has 83%, or five of six, respondents that felt more than half the teachers are consistently caring and respectful in their interactions. Three of five, or 60%, felt that half the teachers have a deep understanding of their subject matter. Another three of five felt more than half the teachers provide instruction that is consistently standards based, challenging, rigorous, and purposeful. Lastly, only one respondent felt that all or almost all of the staff thoroughly know and understand the needs and developmental characteristics of young adolescents.

Overall, Pine Hill teachers did not rate themselves very highly in this area.

Survey question 16 asks respondents, to describe the extent of academic and personal support available for students. Categories include, adults and older youth serve as positive role models, positive behaviors are recognized and affirmed, respect and caring engender a feeling of self-worth, self-confidence, and personal efficacy among students, staff and students have opportunities to examine, explore, discuss, and understand the changes associated with early adolescence, counseling and guidance services assist students in making life, career, and educational choices, a network of trained professionals, special programs, and community resources are available to assist those who have extraordinary needs and require additional services, and an adult mentor is available to students either formally through a teacher/student, advisor/advisee program or informally through a school culture of caring in which teachers or other adults assume responsibility for individual students. The range of selections to choose from are conclusive, extensive, considerable, some evidence, minimal evidence, trace evidence, and no evidence.

This question provides evidence for NYS Essential Element Five. It serves as a reflection of leadership. Any leader who has been in place as a Principal or Superintendent for more than two years is responsible for the type of programs offered to meet the needs of students as well as shaping the culture of the building. Pine Hill results indicate a few areas of strength and weakness in regards to providing both academic and personal support for all students. Thirty-three percent, or two out of six, respondents felt there is conclusive evidence the school provides counseling and guidance services to assist students in making life, career, and educational choices, a network of trained professionals, special programs, and community resources to assist those who have extraordinary needs and require additional services. A majority of respondents, 67%, or four out of six, replied that there is either minimal or a trace of

evidence in the category of providing an adult mentor for students either formally using teachers and staff members or informally through a culture of caring in which teachers assume responsibility for individual students. None of the staff members selected no evidence for any of the categories. In the areas of adults and older youth serving as mentors, positive behaviors being recognized, respect and caring for students, and staff and students have the opportunity to explore changes that occur during adolescence, staff responded that there was either extensive or considerable evidence.

Educational leaders in the building are knowledgeable of middle level education and research. They receive extensive training and focus on meeting the needs of all students. One staff member felt there was a culture to support students that begins with the Principal. “The Principal spends a lot of time in his capacity working to establish relationships with students he sees consistently. He gives them consequences when they do things wrong, but he spends a lot of time working and connecting with all kids as well and he makes it clear that he expects teachers do the same. We should support our students in a positive culture.” This leader leads by example and expects others to live up to his example. Students who display at risk behaviors are often students who have serious needs that are not being met. Staff members can make a significant difference in the lives of these students by forming positive connections with them. Administration is also given credit for “always being very supportive and providing any professional development that we want to pursue.” The middle grades have their own Principal and District leadership has been in place for several years. Administration is also knowledgeable of middle level research and best practices including the NYS Essential Elements.

Pine Hill administrators are knowledgeable, effective, and caring in accordance with NYS Essential Element Five. However, grade levels 5 and 6 do not have common team planning

because of cuts made due to financial pressures. This decision hinders the ability of the school to take a balanced approach to meeting the needs of students. Pine Hill earned moderate ratings of 2.3 on the survey and 2 on the interview.

Pine Hill – Academic and Personal Support (6)

NYS Essential Element Six focuses on providing a support system so students can grow both academically and personally. To what extent would the staff commit to each statement as a responsibility of your school? Question 4 aligns primarily with Essential Element Six and the research that concludes adolescents in general need access to a system that supports both academic achievement and personal development in order to be successful in school. Pine Hill had six of six, or 100%, of respondents that felt that more than half the staff accepts both individual and collective responsibility for both academic and personal development of each student and for ensuring each student a safe, trusting, and inviting learning environment. On the other hand, 33%, or two out of six, respondents stated that less than half of staff believes the school provides a successful transition across grade levels from adolescence to adult hood. Several other responses indicated that the staff believed half or more of the staff develop the whole child and connect students to the school in positive ways.

This survey question asks respondents from each school to rate how they use each communication strategy with parents and families. The rating scale includes almost always, more than half the time, half the time, less than half the time, and almost never. The communication strategies include school wide report cards, occasionally written progress reports, regular written progress reports, student led conferences, phone calls home, parent teacher conferences, school wide progress reports, a web based system with home access to student information, and parent team conferences. Question 10 aligns with Essential Element Six

because it relates to schools having a process for informing parents, families, and community groups of the essential role they play in ensuring student success. Pine Hill has 86%, or six out of seven, staff members who said that school wide report cards are almost always communicated to parents along with 71% who said the web based system with home access is almost always used to communicate with parents. Another 57%, or four out of seven, felt regular school wide progress reports are used to communicate with parents. Three out of seven, or 43%, of respondents said the school almost never uses student led conferences. A majority, or four of seven, respondents felt the school uses one of the nine strategies more than half of the time or almost always four times and a majority feel that the school used one of the nine strategies less than half the time or almost never only once out of the nine categories.

Question 11 aligns closest with Essential Element Six emphasizing a network of academic and personal support for all students. Question 11 asks respondents to rate their school in the areas of connecting each adolescent with the school in a positive manner, a structure to create close, sustained relationships, teacher teams that are responsible for a group of students, a school culture of mutual support and collective responsibility for each student, counseling and guidance services, planning collaboratively and providing staff development opportunities, and emphasis of personal development. The different categories respondents can select from are conclusive evidence, extensive evidence, considerable evidence, some evidence, minimal evidence, trace evidence, and no evidence.

Pine Hill only has one out of six, or 17%, of staff who felt the school has conclusive evidence of counseling and guidance services. Two out of six, or 33%, of respondents felt there is extensive evidence their school has teacher teams who collectively and individually share a responsibility for the academic and personal development of each student, collaborating to

provide staff development opportunities, and emphasize not only academic development, but also personal and social development. Of the seven areas rated, only one person felt there is minimal evidence of planning staff development opportunities and two of six felt there is minimal evidence of personal and social development. The majority of responders felt there is some or considerable evidence of these areas throughout the school.

Interviews reveal Pine Hill is trying to provide a safe, supportive learning environment while balancing students' academic and social needs. One of the best places to start is by enlisting the students and Pine Hill did just that. "We train a big percentage of our kids for safe school ambassadors and we have natural helpers training students in a similar role to observe and help kids who need support. This has been a positive impact on our school." Students outnumber adults in any school and they hear and see social interactions among students that adults typically do not. As a result of this is formal training, students can encourage their peers and help create a safe, supportive environment.

Teachers also care about students and work to meet student academic needs through RtI and AIS. English and math class sizes are reasonable and counselors assign at risk students across classes to allow "teachers the opportunity to focus more on meeting the needs of these students." In addition, Pine Hill keeps parents informed through teacher notes, conferences, and team conferences. One staff member shared, "We are on phone a lot with parents, we bring parents in if there is an issue or problem the intervention team also addresses concern, there are parent teacher conferences in the Fall if there is a need, they don't wait, they bring the parents in right away. I think the communication is very good with parents and the school district as a whole." However, the survey results also indicate that communication most frequently used is passive on the teacher's end through school report cards and grade information posted on the

web. Teachers spoke about the principal forming positive relationships with all students and the expectation that the teachers to do the same. A majority of teachers embrace the idea that they need to provide a supportive environment for students at school. Administration spends time during faculty meetings to talk about students who need a mentor. One teacher replied, “Some people really bought into it and others did not.”

Overall, the administration understands the programs that need to be in place to support the social and emotional needs of students but there are a percentage of staff members who do not appear to buy in as indicated by both the survey and interview results. The loss of scheduled team planning is significant when trying to provide a supportive environment for students in grades 5 and 6. Pine Hill earned a rating of 2 on the survey and on the interview. This evidence indicates the school implemented NYS Essential Element to a moderate degree.

Pine Hill – Professional Development (7)

Professional learning and staff development often serve as a key indicator of the culture within a school. Staff development needs to be ongoing, planned, purposeful, and collaboratively developed. New York State Essential Element Seven measures these characteristics. Question 17 in the survey aligns with NYS Essential Element Seven. There are five categories that include, principals and teachers know the needs and characteristics of middle level students along with instructional strategies that help these students, staff have high expectations for all students, teachers have opportunities to learn about and understand their subject matter, teachers participate in staff development opportunities, and the school has taken a proactive approach in providing training in the Common Core. The range of selections are conclusive, extensive, considerable, some evidence, minimal evidence, trace evidence, and no evidence. The question aligns with Essential Element Seven because they both measure the

degree that professional learning and staff development for all staff are ongoing, planned, purposeful, and collaboratively developed.

Pine Hill has 50%, or three out of six , respondents who believed that Pine Hill has conclusive, extensive, or considerable evidence that principals and teachers know the needs and characteristics of middle level students along with instructional strategies that help these students, staff have high expectations for all students, teachers have opportunities to learn about and understand their subject matter, teachers participate in staff development opportunities, and the school has taken a proactive approach in providing training in the Common Core. One of six, or 17%, felt there is minimal evidence that teachers have opportunities to learn and understand their subject matter and provide training in the Common Core. The Common Core is new and the New York State Education Department has decided to test students on the content despite not releasing all of the modules, so it makes sense that teachers have questions and concerns about a lack of information regarding the Common Core. Teachers expressed during the interview that “administration always provides us with the resources we need to support us.” Another staff member commented, “each year we are also provided with opportunities to complete eighteen hours of professional development work over the summer as well.” There is a wealth of professional development opportunities, but Pine Hill has not explicitly taught the NYS Essential Elements. Teaching the NYS Essential Elements will help both administration and staff members to prioritize what is important when making decisions. Pine Hill earns a rating of 2 for NYS Essential Element Seven.

4. How does Pine Hill School balance meeting the social, emotional, academic and intellectual needs’ of all students?

When Pine Hill respondents were asked if the academic, social, physical, and emotional needs are the focus of the school as a whole, more than half of the respondents said there is enough academic focus, but not enough focus on the social, emotional, and physical needs of students. When asked what instructional tendencies an observer would see if they were visiting their school, a large majority felt there are inconsistent expectations for math, writing, and literacy. The same majority felt there was no consistency in benchmark assessments. Nearly half the respondents felt the curriculum was not articulated both horizontally and vertically. This is partially due to the poorly timed roll out of the NYS Common Core Curriculum. On the positive side, Pine Hill received high ratings for providing targeted interventions and monitoring students in need of support.

Students need a network of academic, social, and emotional support at the middle level. NYS Essential Element Six measures whether schools have this in place. Interviews of Pine Hill administration, teachers, and counselors provide evidence that they implement this Essential Element to a high degree. Staff commented on partnering with parents and providing them with daily updates that are handwritten or can be viewed electronically, and counselors were praised for being there to help kids both in groups and individually. Most impressive is the after-school program and late bus run Pine Hill has in place for students to stay after and receive additional help both academically and emotionally. Teachers and counselors run programs and meet with students in need of help after school. The bus run is essential to making the program available to all students including students who live far away and whose parents may not be able to or willing to drive to school and pick them up.

Pine Hill provides professional development for teachers through BOCES, summer district trainings, and planning time. Pine Hill scored a 3 for implementing Essential Element

Seven to a high degree on both the survey and the interview. Pine Hill also focuses on teaching the NYS Essential Elements and middle grade philosophy. Pine Hill is a nice school where students are smiling and most staff members enthusiastically help their students succeed.

5. What are the obstacles Pine Hill faces when trying to implement the NYS Essential Elements? What can be done to overcome these hurdles?

During interviews, it became clear that administration provides plenty of professional development opportunities for staff, but there is a lack of follow-through to make sure the training makes it into the classroom where it can impact instruction. Administration has been in charge for several years and had time to address these areas. A few factors may be stalling the application of the professional development teachers are receiving. It may be due to resistance from the teaching staff. Change is difficult for people and sometimes teachers feel their way is better so they listen and learn, but never apply the training. This is detrimental to students and staff because it leaves holes and gaps in both academic and social programs. Teachers need to be part of the process to make instructional decisions, but they cannot refuse to teach the district curriculum. It could also be that administration does not follow through enough. This was a criticism shared by staff members during interviews. This is a fairly common criticism of administration. Critics do not always have all of the information when making this criticism.

There has to be a mechanism that indicates whether teachers and the school have reached their objectives. Teachers can set goals, keep portfolios of student work, or set student performance goals to measure learning. Another way to increase accountability is to get into classrooms. If administration is embracing the role of instructional leader they will be able to sit in on classrooms and provide constructive feedback to the teacher that is helpful. Supportive and

helpful classroom observations by administration help staff know that implementing professional development is a top priority..

Pine Hill believes that they need to adapt classroom instruction to meet the needs of student learners. One-third of respondents said they almost always use whole group instruction as their primary means of instruction on a daily basis. Teachers who accept research related to instruction differentiate the instructional strategies they use to meet the diverse learning styles of student learners. Pine Hill teachers have had a great deal of professional development on instructional strategies, but often do not implement them into classroom lessons. Some of the same teachers who were not applying a variety of instructional strategies acknowledged that they receive professional development on a variety of instructional strategies. On a positive note, a majority of teachers outside of the third mentioned above, said they used cooperative groups, lab experiments, and differentiated assignments. Teachers indicated they use a variety of assessments to measure student learning. Essays and written expression are the most common form of assessment and portfolio-based assessments are the least used. Pine Hill earned a 2.3 rating for NYS Essential Element Four on the survey and a 2 rating on the interviews.

NYS Essential Element Five may help explain the information shared by a minority of staff who appear unwilling to further implement the NYS Essential Elements. Element Five measures whether there is strong educational leadership that is willing to encourage, facilitate, and sustain involvement, partnerships, and collaborative efforts among staff members. The feedback from the interviews was that administration offers many opportunities to learn and improve, but lacks follow-through and encouragement of cooperation among staff members to apply what they have learned. The administrative team is very knowledgeable of middle level practices and believes in them strongly. It is up to administration to hold teachers accountable

and to provide a plan of implementation for the needed changes. However, Principals are not the only leaders in the building. It is also up to staff members to provide peer level leadership and encourage the application of middle level research based practices. Pine Hill earned a rating of 2.3 from the survey, which fell below the standard deviation. Pine Hill earned a 2 from the interviews.

6. What is the relationship for Pine Hill between the degree of implementation of the NYS Essential Elements and student achievement?

From 2010-2012, Pine Hill had 43% of all students scoring at level 3 or 4 on the NYS 8th grade ELA test in comparison to 49% of students in New York State scoring at levels 3 or 4. In math, Pine Hill had 42% of students scoring at level 3 or 4 in comparison to the state average of 59% of all students scoring at level 3 or 4 on the NYS 8th grade math test. Pine Hill implemented the Essential Elements to a moderate degree scoring a 1.97 and 2.0 out of 3.0 on both the survey and interview.

A Cross Case Comparison of Four Schools Regarding the Survey and Interview Results

This section compares the degree each school applies the NYS Essential Elements and student achievement on the NYS eighth grade ELA and math exams. In addition, student achievement is discussed in relation to the percentage of free and reduced lunch students in each school. Comparing all four schools allows us to gain insight into how and why each school applied the NYS Essential Elements and the impact this had on each school. The comparative study provides the opportunity for readers to learn from the real life experiences of each school.

Comparing All Four Schools and their Answers to the Research Questions

1. What are the demographics for each school?

All four schools are located in rural Western New York. Student populations across grades K-12, vary. Oak Hill is the smallest school with approximately 400 students. Walnut Hill is next with about 650 students, Maple Hill follows with about 900 students and Pine Hill has the most with about 1,000 students. Maple Hill and Oak Hill are identified by the New York State Education Department as high needs districts with a majority of their students qualifying for free and reduced lunch. Pine Hill and Walnut Hill are considered average need districts with just under half of the students at Pine Hill, and one-third of the students at Walnut Hill qualifying for free and reduced lunch. The most significant difference in demographics is that Oak Hill has twice the percentage of free and reduced lunch students as Walnut Hill.

2. How are middle grades organized? Is the organization configured to support a high degree of implementation of the NYS Essential Elements?

How middle grades are organized impacts their ability to implement the NYS Essential Elements. Does the school have a principal dedicated to serving the middle grades? Does the school have a schedule that includes common team planning time? Both Maple Hill and Pine Hill have principals dedicated to serving the middle grades. Walnut Hill has both a K-5 and 6-12 principal. Oak Hill has a K-12 principal due to being so small. The authors of the Essential Elements argue that it is important for the middle grades to have a leader in administration willing to advocate on their behalf, who is knowledgeable of middle grade level research and best practices. Someone who can articulate what will be lost if teaming or after-school programs are eliminated due to cutbacks. K-12 principals can make middle grades a priority, but high school and elementary grades compete with the amount of time the principal can dedicate to the middle grades.

All four schools have teaming, but regularly scheduled common team planning across all middle grades can only be found at Maple Hill. The other three schools have at least one or more middle grades where team planning is not regularly scheduled due to staffing constraints that result from teachers being assigned to both the middle and other levels. There is extensive research behind effective teaming and the use of teams to meet the needs of students in the middle grades. Teaming is described as a “signature practice” that provides the organizational framework to meet the needs of students. Teaming positively impacts the learning environment for both teachers and students (Flowers, Mertens, & Mulhall, 1999). Teams meet during common planning time to collaborate about ways to intervene on behalf of struggling students. They also contact parents and administration to provide support for students in need, determine who will mentor each student, design and deliver cohesive instructional practices, provide academic support, plan interdisciplinary instruction, reflect on student success, and work together to ensure all students are successful. Teams that schedule time to meet and perform these functions regularly are often effective in meeting the needs of their students (Valentine, 1993). It is critical that middle grades are organized to meet the needs of students by having teaming, common planning time and adequate counselors to meet the demands of students in the middle grades.

3. To what degree do the schools implement the NYS Essential Elements? How do the survey and interview measures compare to each other? Why do or don't schools implement best practices that align with the NYS Essential Elements?

Maple Hill was above the other three schools when measuring the degree of implementation for New York State Essential Elements Two, Four, and Six. Element Two focuses on having an educational program that is comprehensive, challenging, and relevant.

Element Four centers around whether the instructional program is appropriate to the needs of the students. Element Six addresses whether the school is meeting the academic and personal needs of students. Maple Hill appears to be the school that has implemented the Essential Elements to the greatest degree according to this data.

Pine Hill is well below the other schools for Element Two as well as Element Five, which focuses on classroom instruction that is appropriate to the needs of students. However, Pine Hill excelled in Elements Three and Four, which focus on an organization and structure that supports the personal development of each student. Pine Hill implemented the NYS Essential Elements to a moderate degree according to this data.

Walnut Hill finished third overall. They were much closer to Pine Hill than Oak or Maple Hill and implemented the Essential Elements to a moderate degree. Walnut Hill implemented NYS Essential Element Four to the least degree. The questions aligned with measuring NYS Essential Element Four focus on whether the teachers implement a variety of instructional strategies to meet the needs of students, the use of assessments to identify the needs of students and inform the teacher allowing them to adapt instruction, and whether teachers planned with the Common Core Standards in mind. Walnut Hill implemented the NYS Essential Elements to a moderate degree according to this data.

Oak Hill ranked highest for Essential Element Two. This Element deals with a comprehensive, rigorous, educational program. Oak Hill was below the other schools for Element Three, which measures whether the organization and structure support the personal development of each student. Oak Hill was below the other schools for Element Four. Oak Hill either tied or had a higher rating than the average of all four schools on five out of the seven

elements. Overall, Oak Hill implemented the NYS Essential Elements to a slightly above moderate degree.

In summary, both the survey and interview data were very consistent when comparing the two. Both sets of data indicated that Maple Hill implemented the Essential Elements to the highest degree in comparison to the next highest rated school. Oak Hill implements the Elements to a slightly above moderate degree as evidenced by the surveys and interviews. Survey and interview data also revealed that Walnut Hill and Pine Hill implement the Elements to a moderate degree. Ratings for both the survey and interview are parallel. In fact, the overall average of both the survey and interview data resulted in exact 1.98 ratings for Pine Hill.

Maple Hill's organization and structure, which includes a middle grade principal, teaming with common team planning, as well as targeted professional development on the NYS Essential Elements has a major impact on Maple Hill's ability to implement the NYS Essential Elements to a higher degree than the other schools.

4. How does each school balance meeting the social, emotional, academic and intellectual needs' of all students?

In addition to having an excellent organizational structure and philosophy in support of middle grade education, Maple Hill School also has a support network to help meet the varying needs of students. The combination of having both a mentor and advisory program in place puts Maple Hill above the other schools when it comes to implementing the NYS Essential Elements. Every school has a nurturing environment that is full of adults who care about students. However, Oak Hill discussed their supportive and nurturing environment the most. Oak Hill staff members clearly use their smaller size to their advantage by building positive, personal relationships with students and assigning mentors to students in need. Walnut Hill created a

positive learning environment for students, but lacked character education and after-school programs to support their students. Pine Hill has an outstanding after-school program with varying options in which students may participate. However, Pine Hill received poor marks for having inconsistent expectations for math, reading, and writing. The staff acknowledged gaps in the instructional program and this is a detriment to the academic needs of students.

5. What are the obstacles faced by schools when they try to implement the NYS

Essential Elements? What can be done to overcome these hurdles?

Federal and State aid decreases over the last five years have proven to be the most common hurdle across the four schools. Every school mentioned having to make cuts to staffing and only Maple Hill was able to make reductions to staff while preserving regularly scheduled team planning at the same time. Another potential hurdle is the willingness of staff members to work together and go above and beyond to meet the needs of students. The majority of staff members in all four schools meet both of these criteria. However, Pine Hill and Walnut Hill have a few staff members who admit to questioning their role in meeting the needs of students. Some of these same staff members struggle to comply with academic expectations from administration, which in turn works against the students.

One of the hurdles to overcome that could serve to strengthen all areas of the school would be for each school to provide ongoing professional development training about the NYS Essential Elements and other research related to the middle grades. Maple Hill was again the only school that makes the effort to provide targeted training opportunities for their staff to understand better and apply the NYS Essential Elements. Staff members working with middle grade students should all become familiar with the research related to students in the middle grades. For example, it does not take additional money to connect each student with an adult

mentor. It will take changing the daily schedule, continuous professional development, and a commitment on the part of the collective staff to make it happen. All of these can be achieved without spending additional money.

6. What is the relationship between the degree of implementation of the NYS Essential Elements and student achievement?

Table 11 below compares the performances of students from the four schools in this study over three years based on two sets of measures for both mathematics and language arts. Maple Hill had the highest student achievement scores in math and Walnut Hill had the highest scores for ELA. Walnut Hill had the highest and Maple Hill had the second highest scores in ELA. Both Oak Hill and Pine Hill were a distant third and fourth place when comparing student achievement scores in ELA and math.

Table 11 - *NYS ELA & Math Grade 8 Assessments Scores for all Four Schools Participating in the Case Study*

NYS Grade 8 ELA and Math Assessment Case Study Data									
	Maple	Maple	Oak	Oak	Walnut	Walnut	Pine	Pine	NYS
	PI	% 3 &4	PI	% 3 &4	PI	% 3 &4	PI	% 3 &4	Avg.
ELA 2012	657	52	653	65	669	76	651	39	50
ELA 2011	664	63	650	32	666	76	651	46	47
ELA 2010	672	67	655	50	678	75	657	46	51
Total Avg	664.3333	60.667	653	49	671	75.667	653	43.667	49.3333
Math 2012	679	68	671	55	674	48	668	42	62
Math 2011	686	83	663	37	679	62	662	39	59
Math 2010	684	64	668	38	670	40	675	46	55
Total Avg.	683	71.667	667	43.33	674.33	50	668	42.333	58.6667

NYS Cut Point Ranges -

Grade 8 ELA - Level 2 627–657, Level 3 - 658–698, Level 4 - 699–790

Grade 8 Math: Level 2 - 639-672 Level 3 - 673–701 Level 4 - 702–775

Table 11 shares both the performance index rate for the school each year along with the percentage of students who scored level 3 or 4 on the NYS Grade 8 Exam. The calculation of the performance index, or PI, is: $PI = [(number\ of\ continuously\ enrolled\ tested\ students\ scoring\ at\ Level\ 1\ On\ Track + Level\ 1\ On\ Track + Level\ 2\ On\ Track + Level\ 2\ On\ Track + Level\ 2\ NOT\ On\ Track + Level\ 3 + Level\ 3 + Level\ 4 + Level\ 4) \div number\ of\ continuously\ enrolled\ tested\ students] \times 100$. Students who are considered on track to proficiency are counted the same they would be if they were at Level 3 (or Proficient) for the purposes of calculating the state's performance index (PI). A student who receives the designation "on track" means that the student scored Level 1 or 2 on the ELA or Math assessment in 2010-12 and has met his/her growth target for the academic year (NYSED, 2013).

Both the survey and interview provided similar results regarding the degree each school implemented the NYS Essential Elements. All four schools applied the NYS Essential Elements to a moderate or above moderate degree. Implementing the NYS Essential Elements to a high degree, positively impacts the school's ability to meet the varying needs of students. The best example of this is Maple Hill School. Maple Hill is a high needs school that finished first in math and second in ELA in spite of half their students qualifying for free and reduced lunch. Oak Hill had nearly 63% of all students qualifying for free and reduced lunch, yet their scores were similar to Pine Hill which had nearly 20% fewer students qualify for a free and reduced lunch.

Table 12 below compares the degree each school implemented the NYS Essential Elements with the percentage of students scoring at level 3 or 4 on the ELA grade 8th grade test. Walnut

Hill has the highest percentage of students scoring at level 3 or 4 in spite of having the second lowest degree of implementation of the Elements. Maple Hill had the highest degree of implementation and achieved at a high level in comparison to the other schools. Oak Hill had the second highest degree of implementation of the Elements and they ranked three out of the four schools in the study when comparing the ELA and math 8 test scores. Pine Hill implemented the NYS Essential Elements to the least degree and they had among the lowest scores in ELA and math over the three year period.

Table 12 – NYS Essential Element Implementation and ELA Test Performance Chart

Schools	NYS Essential Element Implementation	ELA Test Pct. 3&4
Maple Hill	2.64	61
Oak Hill	2.36	49
Walnut Hill	2.04	76
Pine Hill	1.98	44

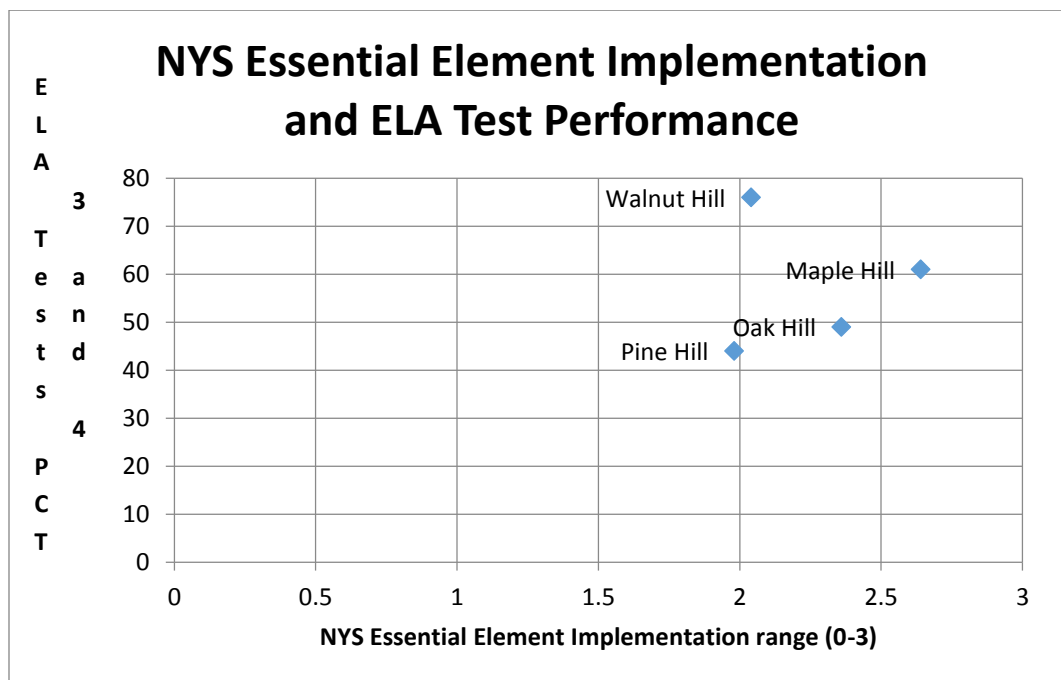
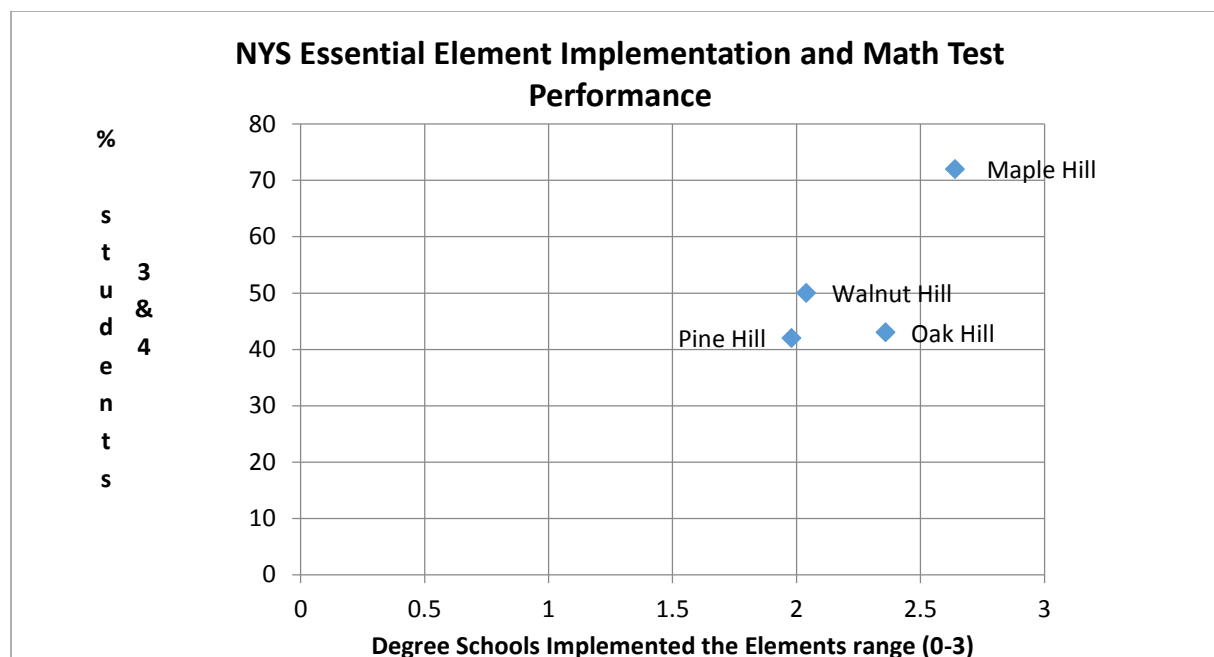


Table 13 below compares the degree each school implemented the NYS Essential Elements and the percentage of students scoring level 3 or 4 on the NYS 8th grade math test over a three year period. Maple Hill had the highest math scores with 72% of their students scoring at a level of three or four. Maple Hill's performance index score was 683. This falls in the middle of the level 3 range of 673-701. Walnut Hill had a performance index of 674 and 50% of all students score at a level of 3 or 4. Fewer Walnut Hill students scored a level 3 or 4 than the three year state average of 59%. Oak Hill and Pine Hill had nearly identical scores in math. Oak Hill had the lowest performance index among all four schools with 667 and only 43% of all students scoring at levels 3 or 4. Pine Hill was right behind them with 668 and only 42% of all students scoring at levels 3 or 4. Both scores fall in the upper section of level 2, which has a range of 639-672 and they fall below the state average of 59% of all students across the state scoring at levels 3 or 4.

Table 13 - NYS Essential Element Implementation and Math Test Performance Chart

Schools	NYS Essential Element Implementation	Math Test PCT. Levels 3 and 4
Maple Hill	2.64	72
Oak Hill	2.36	43
Walnut Hill	2.04	50
Pine Hill	1.98	42



Poverty and Test Performance

Eric Jensen published a study titled, Teaching with Poverty in Mind in 2009. Jensen summarized a wealth of studies that documented there were significant differences between student achievement levels that can be traced back to differences in socio-economics. It is not surprising, therefore, that, there is a large gap between poor and well-off children's performance on just about every measure of cognitive development and academic achievement, from the Bayley Infant Behavior Scales to standardized achievement tests. The correlations between socioeconomic status and cognitive ability and performance are typically quite significant (Gottfried, Gottfried, Bathurst, Guerin, & Parramore, 2003). A host of factors make it much more difficult for low income students to overcome the many hurdles that can limit academic and behavior success in school.

In Craig's study (2015), he found that 65% of student achievement in the NYS middle schools he studied could be attributed to the socio-economic status of the students. In

comparison, he believed the NYS Essential Elements impacted student achievement by 10%. Schools can control whether or not they implement the Essential Elements and they cannot control the poverty levels of their families. According to Craig, it is important to implement the Essential Elements not only because it will positively impact student test performance but because it supports establishing a positive learning environment and better meets the needs of students as well.

It is interesting that Maple Hill is identified as a high needs school and 50% of their students are eligible free and reduced lunch and Maple students achieve at a similar rate to Walnut Hill which has 32% students receiving free and reduced lunch. Oak Hill is also identified as a high needs school and they have 63% of their students qualifying for free and reduced lunch. In spite of this hurdle they achieve at a similar rate to Pine Hill which has 45% of students requiring a free and reduced lunch. Both comparisons support the assertion that implementing the NYS Essential Elements helps schools with large numbers living in poverty to achieve at higher levels. The Elements help decrease the achievement gap between students living in poverty and students with a higher socio-economic status. The Essential Elements help schools overcome some of the hurdles of poverty.

Table 14 below compares the percentage of free and reduced lunch students with the percentage of students who scored at level 3 or 4 on the NYS 8th grade ELA test over a three year period. Maple Hill has 5% greater percentage of students qualifying for a free and reduced lunch and they outperform Pine Hill by having 17% more of their students score at a level 3 or 4. Walnut Hill has a commanding lead on the number of students scoring at level 3 or 4 with 76% achieving that mark. It appears that Walnut Hill has a strong ELA program to earn those results.

Oak Hill has 18% more students qualifying for free and reduced lunch and they have 5% more students scoring at level 3 or 4 on the NYS ELA 8 test.

Table 14 – Poverty and ELA Test Performance

Schools	% Free and Reduced Lunch	ELA Test Pct. 3&4
Maple Hill	50	61
Oak Hill	63	49
Walnut Hill	32	76
Pine Hill	45	44

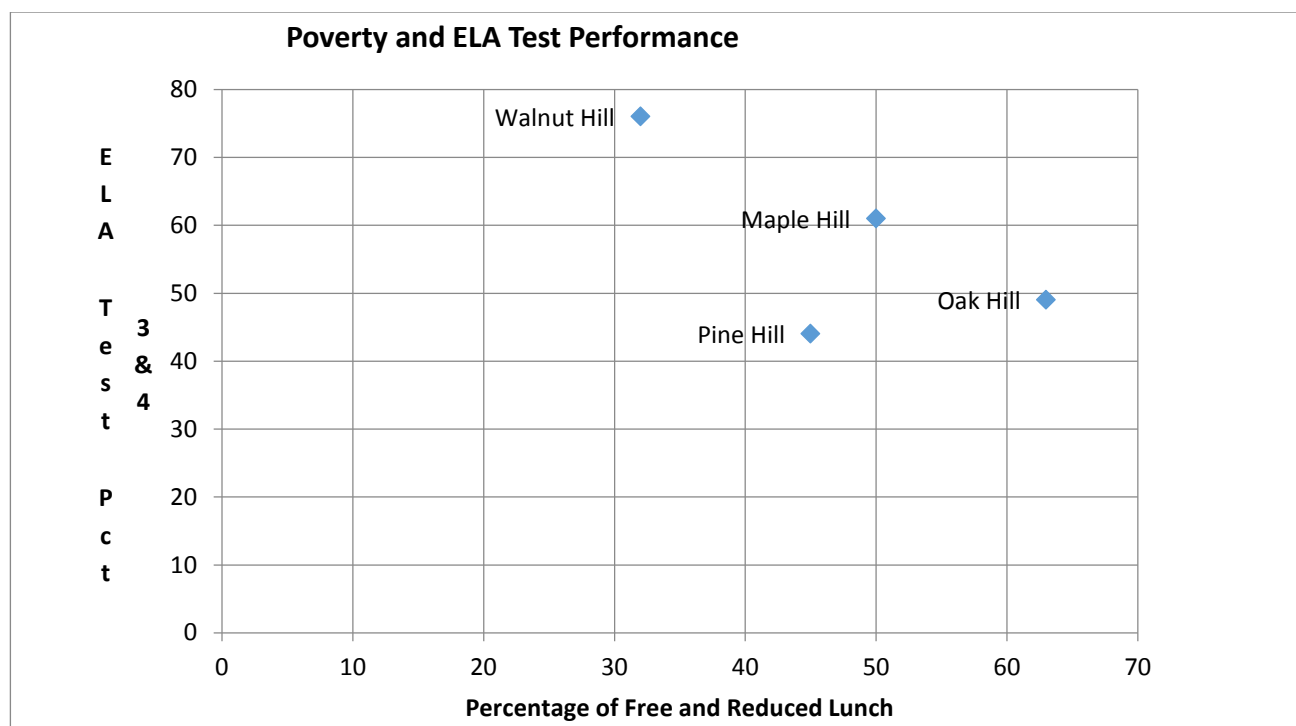


Table 15 below compares the percentage of free and reduced lunch students and the percentage of students who scored at level 3 or 4 on the NYS math 8th grade test over a 3 year period. Maple Hill had by far the greatest three year percentage amongst all four schools with 72% scoring at level 3 or 4 on the math exam. Walnut Hill is a distant second with 50% of their students scoring a level 3 or 4 on the math exam. Once again, Pine Hill and Oak Hill have the fewest percentage of students scoring at levels 3 or 4 with 42% and 43% on the NYS 8th grade math exam.

Table 15 - Poverty and Math Test Performance

Schools	% Free and Reduced Lunch	Math Test PCT. Levels 3 and 4
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Maple Hill	50	72
Oak Hill	63	43
Walnut Hill	32	50
Pine Hill	45	42

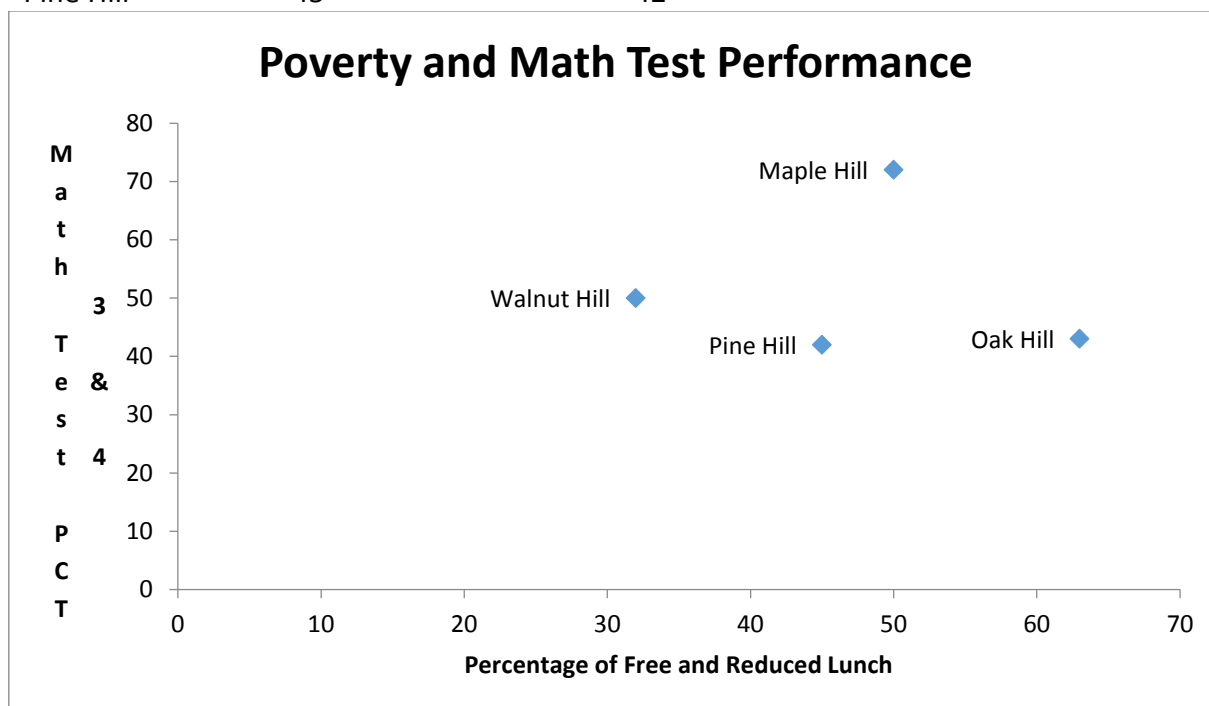


Table 16 below compares the three year average for the percentage of students receiving free or reduced lunch and the three year performance index average on the ELA 8th grade test for each school. The poverty and performance index table shows Walnut Hill as the highest performing school. Maple Hill is not far behind in spite of having 18% more students qualifying for free and reduced lunch. Oak Hill and Pine Hill have the same performance index in spite of Oak Hill having 18% more students qualifying for free and reduced lunch.

Table 16 – Poverty and ELA Performance Index

Schools	%Free / Reduced Lunch	ELA Performance Index
Maple Hill	50	664
Oak Hill	63	653
Walnut Hill	32	671
Pine Hill	45	653

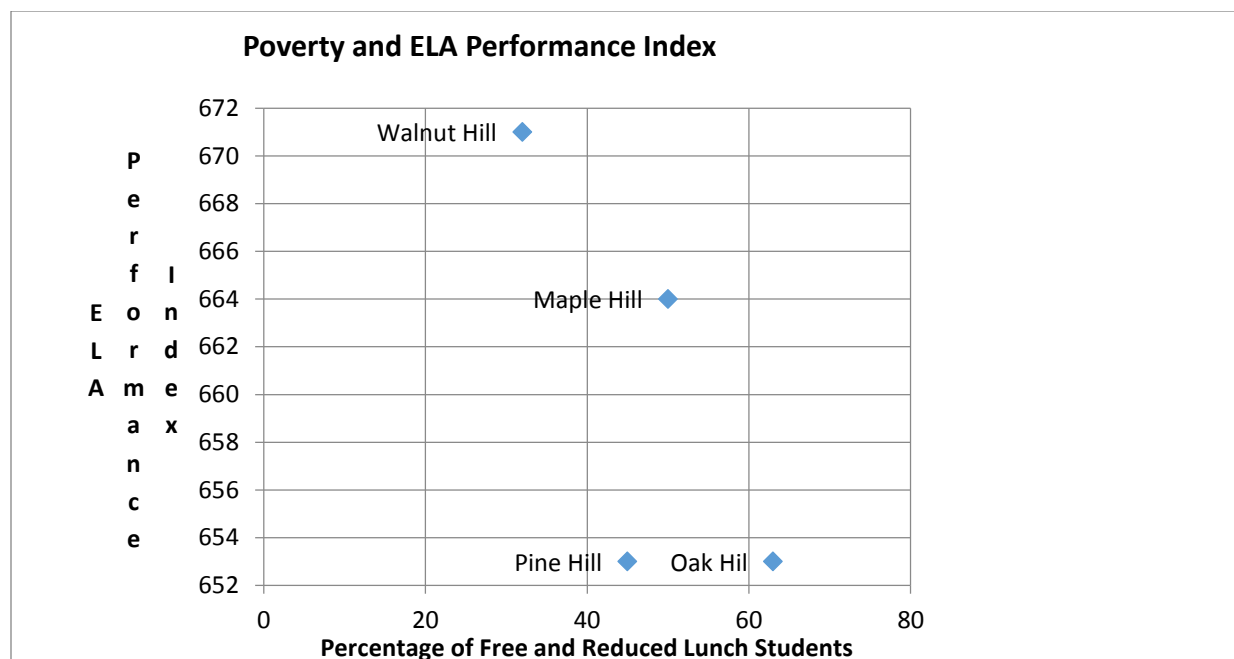
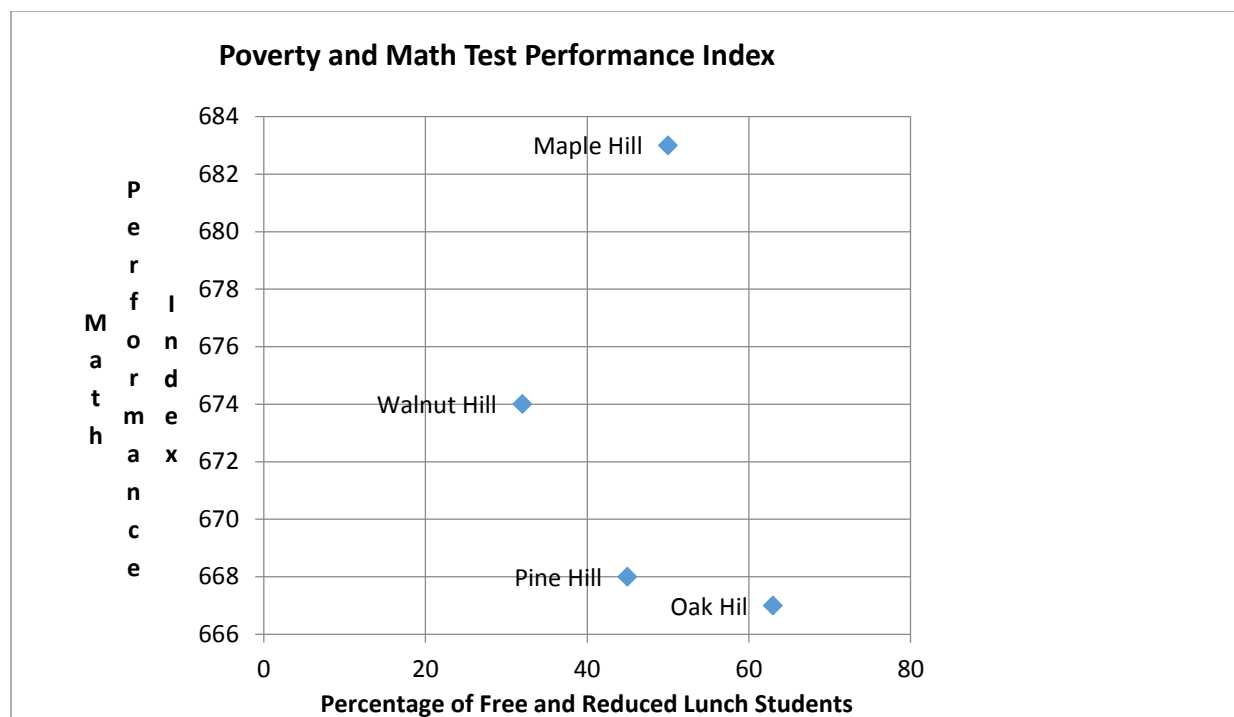


Table 17 below compares the percentage of students receiving free or reduced lunch and the three year performance index average on the ELA 8th grade test for each school. The performance index numbers listed in table 17 further emphasizes the separation in achievement between Pine Hill, Oak Hill and Maple Hill, Walnut Hill. Walnut Hill achieves at the highest level and Maple Hill is second in spite of having half of their students live in poverty. Oak Hill and Pine Hill have similar results in spite of Oak Hill having 63% of students qualifying for free and reduced lunch. It appears that Maple Hill and Oak Hill were able to achieve at similar levels in ELA and math as Walnut and Pine Hill, in spite of having a greater number of students living in poverty.

Table 17 - Poverty and Math Performance Index

Schools	% Free and Reduced Lunch	Math Performance Index
Maple Hill	50	683
Oak Hill	63	667
Walnut Hill	32	674
Pine Hill	45	668



Maple Hill stands out as the example of a school successfully implementing the NYS Essential Elements to the degree that it positively impacts student performance on standardized tests in math. Oak Hill also finishes close to Pine Hill which has fewer students living in poverty. Oak Hill applied the Essential Elements to higher degree than Pine Hill and it appears it helped Oak Hill's students' achieve similar to Pine Hill's in spite of Oak Hill having 18% more students living in poverty.

From 2010-2012, Maple Hill had the highest math scores among the four schools with a performance index of 683 and 72% of their students scored at level 3 or 4. Once again, Oak Hill with 667 performance index and 43% of students at level 3 or 4 and Pine Hill with a 668 performance index and 42% of students at level 3 or 4, were among the two lowest performing schools. Walnut Hill had a performance index of 674 and 50% of students achieved level 3 or 4. They finished second in terms of achievement amongst the four schools.

Oak Hill and Pine Hill are both low achieving schools in comparison to Maple Hill and Walnut Hill. Oak Hill has 63% and Pine Hill has 45% of all students receiving free and reduced lunch. In spite of Oak Hill having 18% more free and reduced lunch students they are able to achieve at a similar level as Pine Hill. Oak Hill and Pine Hill had the same three year moderate performance indicator of 653 in ELA and Pine Hill had a performance indicator of 668 in math in comparison to Oak Hill's performance indicator of 667 in math. This serves as an example of schools with high needs achieving at similar rates to other schools with moderate needs. According to the study, the high need schools were able to level the playing field and achieve at a similar rate of achievement to other schools with fewer free and reduced lunch students.

From 2010-2012, Walnut Hill had the highest performance index (PI) of 671 in ELA and the highest percentage of students scoring at level 3 or 4 at 76% when the state average was 49%. A performance index of 671 placed Walnut Hill's overall test scores in the middle of level 3, which has a range of 658-698. Students who achieve at level 3 or 4 are deemed to be proficient and on track to be college and career ready. Maple Hill ranked second with a performance index of 664, which falls within level 3. Maple Hill also had 61% of all students score a level 3 or 4 on the 8th grade ELA exam from 2010-2012. This is 12% above the three year state moderate of 49%. Oak Hill students' achieved a performance index of 653 in ELA and 49% of their students achieved at level of 3 or 4. This tied the state moderate of students scoring at levels 3 or 4. Only 44% of the students at Pine Hill scored at levels 3 or 4 and the moderate performance index rating was 653. Pine Hill had the lowest scores in ELA among all four schools and they were below the three year state moderate by 5%.

This data suggests that implementing the Essential Elements may have allowed schools with a greater percentage of free and reduced lunch students to achieve at a similar or higher

level of student achievement in comparison to schools with fewer free and reduced lunch students. Standardized test scores were impacted to a disparate degree when schools in the study implemented the Essential Elements to a below moderate degree in comparison to schools that implemented the Essential Elements to a high degree. Schools with higher percentages of free and reduced lunch students often have greater obstacles to help students overcome in order for learning to occur. If these needs are not met it will contribute to a disparate impact on their academic achievement. It appears that implementing the NYS Essential Elements may have contributed to higher student achievement on the state tests when considering the results produced by the four schools in the study.

Did the schools identified by the State Education Department as high needs on the school report card take a more balanced approach to applying the NYS Essential Elements in comparison to schools with moderate needs? Both high needs schools applied the Essential Elements to a greater degree than the moderate needs schools. Maple Hill applied the Elements the highest on the survey and interview averaging 2.64 and Oak Hill was second averaging 2.36 out of 3. The two schools identified as having moderate needs, Walnut Hill and Pine Hill applied the Elements to a lesser degree with Walnut Hill averaging 2.04 and Pine Hill averaging 1.98. Maple and Oak Hill both may apply the Essential Elements out of necessity. Students living in poverty often have greater needs than students who are not living in poverty. For example, students living in poverty may come to school without their basic needs being met. These basic needs must be met by the school in some manner before the student can become a successful learner. Schools often have to play a key role in meeting these needs (Kozol, 1992).

Both Walnut Hill and Pine Hill received poor marks for implementing NYS Essential Element Three and Six. Element Three measure how well the organization and structure meet

the academic and personal development of students. Element Six measures the ability of a school to provide academic and personal support for all students.

Walnut Hill focused heavily on academics but did not take a balanced approach to also meeting the social and emotional needs of students. Walnut Hill was strong when it came to integrating technology into the classroom and providing professional development programs for teachers. However, Walnut Hill did not strike the balance of investing in programs and training to meet the social needs of students. A majority of teachers felt staff did not take personal responsibility for the personal and social development of all students. Some middle grade teams lost their scheduled team meeting as well. This is a valuable time when teams try to plan ways to meet the academic and social needs of students. Schools that take a balanced, student centered approach to education will better meet the social and emotional needs of students along with their academic needs.

Pine Hill did not have enough programs in place to adequately meet all of their student's social, emotional and academic needs. Pine Hill respondents mentioned they were lacking in counseling services for students. Some staff also felt they were not responsible for the personal development of their students. Pine Hill also did not have team planning scheduled into the day for all teams.

Oak Hill did not have enough programs in place to adequately meet all of the needs of all students. For example, they do not have scheduled common team planning time for all teams or after school programs for students to participate in. However, Oak Hill is a small school that graduates three dozen students per year. Everyone knows everyone and teachers take responsibility to develop students both academically and personally. Teachers go out of their

way to mentor and support all students. Small schools often benefit by having at least one staff member assigned to work with a struggling student.

Maple Hill is the only school to schedule team planning for all teams. They also had adequate after school and counseling programs in place. A majority of teachers at Maple Hill mentored students to make sure they had someone they were close to. Maple Hill had extensive evidence that they understood the Essential Elements and their practices and programs aligned with the Elements.

A comparison of the four schools in Western New York provides some support but not consistent support, for the hypotheses, the more that a school implements the NYS Essential Elements for Standards Based Middle Schools and Programs, the higher their student achievement results will be on the NYS Eighth Grade ELA and math tests. Maple Hill implemented the NYS Essential Elements to the highest degree and had the highest test scores. Pine Hill implemented the NYS Essential Elements the least degree and had the lowest test scores among the four schools. Oak Hill implemented the Essential Elements to the second highest degree and tied Pine Hill for last in ELA scores and finished last in math results with Pine Hill close behind. Walnut Hill implemented the Essential Elements to the second lowest degree and had the highest ELA scores and the second highest math scores.

Maple Hill implemented the NYS Essential Elements on both the survey and interview. Oak Hill finished second on both the survey and interview. Walnut Hill placed third on the survey results and tied Pine Hill for third place on the interview. Oak Hill had the highest number of students living in poverty and Walnut Hill had the least number of students living in poverty. If Craig (2014) is correct the socio-economic status of the students may have contributed to Oak Hill's low scores and Walnut Hill's higher scores. It may explain why there is not a more robust correlation

between their degree of implementation of the NYS Essential Elements and their students' test performance.

CHAPTER 5 – FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

Overview

In 2003, the New York State Board of Regents issued its policy statement on middle level education. It required all middle level programs consisting of a combination of grades 5-8 to implement the Essential Elements of Standards Focused Middle Level Schools and Programs. During the same year, the Commissioner of Education Regulation 100.4 also required all middle level programs to have the New York State Education Department's seven Essential Elements in place (University of the State of New York Board of Regents, 2003). Many schools were already implementing many aspects of the New York State Essential Elements since they align with research on middle grade level education. For example, the concept of having academic teams is one of many research-based practices found in the NYS Essential Elements. Math, English, science, social studies, and other subject area teachers on such teams all teach a common group of students. Teachers need to focus on creating a student-centered culture focused on forming positive relationships with every student and supporting their efforts to learn in multiple ways (George & Alexander, 1993). Schools take a balanced approach to meeting both the social and academic needs of students.

The NYS Essential Elements rubric created the opportunity for schools to assess and evaluate whether or not they were implementing the NYS Essential Elements (New York State Middle Level Education Program, 2004). The New York State Education Department began evaluating and recognizing top middle schools who met the characteristics of an Essential Elements: Schools-To-Watch. These characteristics include both the NYS Essential Elements and middle grade research based reforms that are categorized into four domains: developmental responsiveness, academic excellence, social equity, organization and structure. The identified

exemplary schools were intended to serve as model schools for other schools to learn from and visit. More and more middle schools in New York State began striving to implement the NYS Essential Elements, as evidenced by the increasing number of schools who applied to be a School To Watch. By 2015, twenty-seven schools have been designated as a New York State and National Schools-To-Watch school.

Even though there was an increase in the number of schools implementing the Essential Elements it became increasingly difficult to implement middle grade reforms. In 2009, New York State faced a \$10 billion dollar deficit. Over the next five years, the NYS Government cut state aid for public schools by more than \$9 billion dollars. Many school districts concluded that they could no longer afford to provide all of the programs associated with the Essential Elements. Other schools endured similar pressure but chose to preserve key programs. In this study only one of the four schools was able to sustain all of their existing research-based practices and programs that align with the NYS Essential Elements. The NYS Essential Elements are a valuable tool that should be used to guide schools with middle grades and assist them in creating their own culture and programs that align with the Essential Elements.

This study was designed to measure the degree to which each school implements the New York State Essential Elements of Standards Focused Middle Level Schools and Programs and consider whether doing so may impact student achievement. The Essential Elements don't provide the full explanation for factors that support student achievement. However, this study does provide further insight that they contribute to a positive culture and help level achievement for schools with a majority of students living in poverty. It also shares how and why each school implements middle grade practices and discusses the impact this has on each school. It also

analyzes student achievement scores for each school on the NYS ELA and math exams and how implementation the NYS Essential Elements could positively impact student achievement.

Four schools from Western New York agreed to participate in the study. Two high needs and two moderate need schools were intentionally selected to provide insight into how each school utilized the NYS Essential Elements and how their NYS 8th Grade ELA and math test scores might have been impacted. Test scores were collected and analyzed over a three-year period. Volunteer staff members completed a survey measuring the degree to which each school implements the NYS Essential Elements. Interviews of volunteer staff members followed. The interviews provided greater insight into how and why each school implements the NYS Essential Elements. The NYS Essential Elements Rubric that is used to identify Schools To Watch was used as a guide to measure the degree each school implemented the Elements. Each school received a rating based on the degree they implemented the NYS Essential Elements.

The study is designed to provide a uniquely in-depth look into how and why schools apply the NYS Essential Elements and the impact this has on their school. The summary below examines the insight gained by studying how the four schools applied each of the NYS Essential Elements.

Findings

NYS Essential Element One – Philosophy & Mission

All four schools in this study had mission statements that pledged allegiance to basic middle school principles. Some schools seemed more committed to act on those principles than others. Leaders in all four schools spoke about meeting the varying needs of their students and the mission statements of all four schools reflected this as well. Meeting the varying and unique needs of students is the heart and soul behind the reason for implementing the NYS Essential

Elements. The most important benefit that implementing the NYS Essential Elements brings to a school is a positive school culture based on middle grade level research. Schools that understand the principles of the Essential Elements, establish a belief system that focuses on taking a balanced approach to educating students (NMSA, 2007). Schools that adopt the beliefs from *This We Believe* and implement the NYS Essential Elements help create a school culture that is student centered and focused on meeting the social, emotional, academic, and intellectual needs of all students. Among the four schools who participated in the study, the two schools that implemented the NYS Essential Elements to a higher degree took a more balanced approach to meeting the varying needs of students. The schools had programs and practices in place to focus on taking a balanced approach to meeting the academic and emotional needs of students. Using the NYS Essential Elements can help schools establish the student-centered culture that is described in the school's mission statement.

NYS Essential Element Two – Educational Program

The NYS Essential Elements call for the educational program to be standards based, challenging, and relevant. At the time of the study, all four schools had just begun implementing the NYS Common Core Curriculum. In fact, a majority of the curriculum had not been released by the state, so every school was similar at this point. All four schools receive a wealth of professional development opportunities through BOCES. All four schools have mapped out their curriculum and they have all begun training teachers to make the shifts to the NYS ELA and Math Common Core Curriculum. One of the four schools rated poorly on both the survey and interview when asked if they had common expectations and a guaranteed, viable curriculum across grade levels. The same school had the lowest student achievement scores in comparison to the other three schools. Common expectations for writing, literacy, and numeracy are needed

to ensure a guaranteed, viable curriculum that is rigorous and relevant. Educational researcher, Robert Marzano, believes the school-level factor with the greatest impact on student achievement is a “guaranteed and viable curriculum.” (Marzano, 2003). It is critical that teachers follow the curriculum to eliminate any gaps in what students are learning.

NYS Essential Element Three – Organization & Structure

Middle grade students learn best in environments where both their academic and personal needs are met. Academic teams are organized to do just that. Teams have a group of core subject area teachers teaching the same group of students. Teaming is structured to create a smaller environment where close, sustained positive relationships can be formed between students and teachers (NYSED, 1989). Advisory groups are another way to create a close, sustained positive environment. Advisory groups meet every morning in small groups with one staff member meeting with every group (Shulkind & Foote, 2009). Students have the opportunity to discuss real life issues while learning positive character traits. Only one of the four schools in the study implemented NYS Essential Element Three to a high degree and that was only following evidence obtained during interviews; evidence from the survey indicated the school implemented Essential Element Three to a moderate degree. This was also the only school that provided professional development to their teaching and staff by targeting ways to further implement the NYS Essential Elements. Having a greater understanding of the Essential Elements assisted this school when facing difficult financial decisions. When it came time to make reductions, this was the only school to preserve team planning across all grade levels along with a mentoring and advisory program. Both the superintendent and principal of this school have a clear understanding of the NYS Essential Elements and their benefit to students. It is likely that this was essential to preserving these programs.

NYS Essential Element Four – Classroom Instruction

“Every young adolescent requires skilled and caring teachers who have a thorough understanding of their subject(s) and of the students they teach (NYSED, 1989).” This quote is taken directly from the NYS Essential Elements bulleted list. Teachers need to have a deep understanding of their subject matter and the learning standards associated with the subject. In addition, teachers must understand middle grade students and their need for social acceptance. Students need to be treated in a fair, respectful manner and have adults who genuinely care about them working with them. Teachers in all four schools use data to inform their instruction. They also receive what they report to be excellent professional development support on research-based academic and social programs such as I-Ready and Capturing Kid’s Hearts. Two of the schools, who did not rate as well on the NYS Essential Elements, had a few staff members who reported that they were not personally responsible for the development of their students. They were outspoken by saying they did not like calling parents or staying after school to provide extra support for students. They felt their job was simply to instruct the students on the subject matter. Neither school provided formal training on the NYS Essential Elements. The NYS Essential Elements addresses the balanced approach schools need to take in order for teachers to meet the needs of their students.

NYS Essential Element Five – Educational Leadership

Educational leadership is not limited to administrators. Leaders can be found in teachers, coaches, directors, advisors and students. Effective leaders create, promote, and sustain a positive culture of mutual support and collective responsibility for the education and personal development of every student (NYSED, 1989). When analyzing the results of the survey and

interviews, the data showed that most staff members understood and accepted their responsibility to develop the whole child. However, there were a few instances when people stated it was not their job to call parents, stay after school to provide additional support for students, or promote positive character traits. Staff members who did not feel it was in their job description to call parents or promote positive character traits are not doing their part to develop the whole child. Leaders and teachers in one school took the opportunity to discuss why the NYS Essential Elements are beneficial to student growth and learning. The Principal of the school that did teach the NYS Essential Elements had these discussions with his staff; the other schools did not teach the Elements, but left their staff members to forge their own belief systems. Teaching research-based practices like the NYS Essential Elements and expecting that all staff will work collectively to implement them ensures that more people are leading in the same direction. The four schools studied reinforced the idea that good leaders help shape the perception and beliefs of others to ensure the organization has a focus. If this is not done well, it is up to individuals to develop their own belief system, which may be detrimental to progressing as an organization.

NYS Essential Element 6 - Academic and Personal Support

Middle grade students need both academic and personal support in order to be successful during these difficult years of transition. Schools are expected to have programs and practices in place in order to meet the varying social, emotional, academic, and intellectual needs of students. After analyzing the four schools it became clear that three of the schools had eliminated or made reductions to counseling opportunities, after-school programs, team time, or extracurricular activities after school. Collectively, the three schools cut back or reduced programs and practices that supported the emotional health of students. The remaining school made reductions

to staffing that did not eliminate common team planning time, counseling services or the after school program, all of which support meeting the social and emotional needs of all students.

NYS Essential Element 7 – Professional Development

Professional learning should be ongoing, collaborative, purposeful, and continuous in order to be effective. All four schools in Western New York offer a wealth of professional development opportunities. Many of these opportunities are available to schools through the Board of Cooperative Educational Services also known as BOCES. Western New York Schools are able to afford these services through collective purchasing and any cuts to BOCES aid would cripple the professional development opportunities of the schools. BOCES aid has been cut by New York State in its recent series of funding cuts in education.

A Recommendation to Add Two Additional Essential Elements

There are a few additional elements that could be due to their significance and relevance to students and schools being successful. Parent involvement and keeping the board of education informed are the two additional elements that should be added. Both parents and schools boards have grown in importance as districts face financial stress and various political pressures.

Currently, the New York State Essential Elements include some aspects of the two suggested additional Elements. Involving parents and guardians is included in the NYS Essential Element Rubric under element two, letter h and four letter j. Robert Marzano's research (2003) discovered that whether or not a family values education is one of the most important variables directly linked to academic success for a student. Partnering with parents deserves to have its own element due to the impact it has on whether or not the student is successful in school.

The district office and board of education are not currently mentioned in the NYS Essential Elements Rubric. In every district, the Superintendent makes various

recommendations to the Board of Education and with their final approval the program or practice is put into place. Therefore, it is critical that both superintendents and boards of education understand how and why schools implement the NYS Essential Elements. Principals and their middle school staff need to make a conscious effort to communicate the programs and practices that benefit students to the decision makers in the district and the community at large.

Essential Element 8: District Office and the Board of Education - All district office employees, including the Superintendent and Board of Education, will understand the research related to the NYS Essential Elements and the benefits the elements provide for all students.

8.1 Middle school teams will inform the district office staff, board of education, parents and community members about the various ways they apply the NYS Essential Elements and how they benefit students in various ways..

8.2 Both the superintendent and board of education will make programs and practices that align with the NYS Essential Elements a priority when creating the annual district budget.

8.3 Schools will make time to provide professional development that will result in schools applying the NYS Essential Elements.

Essential Element 9: Involvement of Parents and Guardians – Schools and parents will form positive relationships that focus on supporting students in an effort to help them succeed.

9.1 Schools will provide a welcoming environment for all parents that is supportive and positive.

9.2 Parents will value education in their home and provide a safe, supportive, healthy environment for their students.

9.3 Parents and schools will both communicate in multiple ways and be accessible in order to support the success of their student.

Conclusions

During the 1950's, Nelson Bossing (1954) began calling for schools to be formed with grades 6-8. At the time, the junior high configuration included grades 7-9. In the 1960's, William Alexander (1965) , Donald Eichorn (1965) and Emmitt Williams agreed that middle school age students had specific social and emotional needs in addition to their academic needs that had to be met in order for them to have the best opportunity at obtaining academic success. Over the years case studies conducted by Payton and Zseller (2000), Lutz (2004), Jadallah (2005), McGorry (2009), Williams (2005), and Craig (2014) all reported about the benefits students received from schools that adopted the middle grade philosophy. After all of this research, it is surprising that education leaders and politicians do not often include the NYS Essential Elements in their discussions about what needs to be done to fix schools. These groups also do not currently incentivize schools in New York to apply the practices and programs found in the NYS Essential Elements.

My study furthers the research that supports schools taking a balanced approach that addresses both the academic/intellectual and social/emotional needs of their students. This study does not claim to have found causation between implementing the elements and increasing standardized test scores. However, the experience of the four schools in the study does support the conclusions of Payton, Zseller (2000) and Craig (2014) who found that applying the NYS Essential Elements to a high degree can contribute to increasing student achievement. The relative success of the two high needs schools in this study, suggests that implementing the

essential elements may explain why they beat the odds and performed better on achievement tests than the proportion of students' in poverty would lead us to expect.

This study provides in depth perspective on why and how schools apply the NYS Essential Elements and the struggles they face in doing so. The study discusses the specific impact the NYS Essential Elements have on the culture of a school and why they are important to students. The study supports the argument that the essential elements need to be applied in a collective manner. Applying the elements sporadically will result in mixed results, similar to the early research on specific components of the elements such as teaming, mentoring and interdisciplinary learning. The only high needs school that applied the essential elements in a collective manner was able to overcome some of the hurdles of poverty and achieve at a high level in comparison to the other three schools in the study.

This study also provides insight into how reductions in state aid have made it more difficult for schools to apply the Essential Elements and it discusses the need to have knowledgeable administrators who understand the Essential Elements and the impact they have on students so they preserve key programs and practices that have a positive impact on the students. Some programs and practices can be preserved with little to no cost to the district. Other programs with higher costs can be preserved sometimes if school leaders give them high priority. The study also reveals the importance of BOCES when meeting the professional developmental needs of schools in Western New York as they work collaboratively in a rural setting to make the many mandated curricular changes required by the State Education Department. The study calls for educational agencies and politicians to begin supporting the application of the Essential Elements in the middle grades.

Data from the study revealed that the school that implemented the NYS Essential Elements to the highest degree also experienced the greatest increase in student achievement over the three-year period. This is also the school that had the highest test score in math and second highest in ELA. The school that implemented the NYS Essential Elements to the lowest degree had the lowest scores among the four schools on the NYS 8th Grade ELA and math test. These two schools' data support the theory that the degree to which a school implements the NYS Essential Elements will positively impact their test scores on the NYS ELA and math 8 exams. Another school implemented the NYS Essential Elements to only a moderate degree. The school still achieved at a higher level finishing first in ELA and second in math. The school met the academic needs of their students by teaching a guaranteed, viable curriculum, providing excellent professional development for teachers and effective instructional services for students. However, the school fell short in meeting the social and emotional needs of students. The last school in the study implemented the NYS Essential Elements to a higher than moderate degree largely because of their smaller size. The smaller school environment of a school that graduates around 30 students a year is conducive to meeting the social and emotional needs of all students. For example, staff members knew their students, their needs and how to best meet those needs due to their small size. However, the smaller school finished tied for last when it came to student achievement in ELA and they were last in math. The smaller school had nearly the exact achievement scores as the school that implemented the NYS Essential Elements to a less than moderate degree and the smaller school had 20% more students living in poverty. Having a similar degree of student achievement in spite of many more students living in poverty, further supports the notion that implementing the NYS Essential Elements helps students living in poverty achieve at a higher level.

Student Achievement, Poverty and the NYS Essential Elements

The two schools designated by the New York State Education Department as “high need” with the highest percentage of free and reduced lunch students implemented the NYS Essential Elements to higher degrees than the two “moderate need” schools. It is plausible that schools with higher percentages of students living in poverty have a greater need to provide a balanced approach to the education of their students because their students may have greater social and emotional needs. Eric Jensen explains it this way, “Children raised in poverty rarely choose to behave differently, but they are faced daily with overwhelming challenges that affluent children never have to confront, and their brains have adapted to suboptimal conditions in ways that undermine good school performance” (Jensen, 2009).

Beginning with conception, children from families living in poverty are at a disadvantage in comparison to their wealthier peers. Factors such as prenatal care, toxins and stress can have a strong influence on the development of the child when they are still in the womb (Rutter, Moffitt, and Caspi, 2006). Once born, students living in poverty face challenges that affluent children never have to face. Weak attachments at infancy lead to insecurity during early childhood years. Factors such as teen motherhood, parental depression and a lack of sensitivity to regularly meeting the needs of the infant, can lead to emotional instability. Later in life this instability can result in poor school performance and poor behavior on the child’s part (Jensen, 2009).

Many poor mothers do not receive the proper pre-natal care which can impact I.Q. and emotional behaviors before the child is even born. Children raised in poverty are much less likely to be raised in a safe, predictable environment with a strong, reliable care taker who provides ten to twenty hours a week of harmonious, reciprocal interactions. This process is

known as attunement and is critical during the first 6-24 months of life in order for the child to be able to eventually develop a wide range of emotions, including gratuity, forgiveness and empathy. Parents from wealthy households enrich their student's learning on a daily basis. Parents from low income households are often afflicted with depression and low self-esteem. They usually work long hours often leaving their child in front of the television or tended to by siblings who are not prepared to meet the needs of an infant. Low income families tend to have acute stress in their homes that is debilitating to the child's physical, psychological, emotional and cognitive functioning (Jensen, 2009).

Children raised in poverty often lack a safe, predictable, and stable environment. In order for students to develop a range of healthy emotions including gratitude, forgiveness and empathy they require a consistent dose of harmonious, reciprocal interactions with caregivers. Children raised in poverty are much less likely to have these crucial needs met in comparison to their more affluent peers. Students with secure attachments behave better in school (Jensen, 2009).

Schools that work with parents can mitigate many of the challenges students face. Byrk (2010) outlines a framework of essential supports that include developing strong ties between parents, school and the community. Byrk (2010) found that student motivation to achieve increased when schools focused on partnering with parents to strengthen parenting skills related to establishing study habits, valuing education and increasing academic expectations. Students living in poverty can overcome their circumstances in life and in some instances living in poverty provides these students with more resolve than ever to be successful. Bill Clinton and Oprah Winfrey are two living examples of people who grew up living in poverty without all of their needs met. However, with the support of a family member and school they have both talked about how their experience only gave them more resolve to find success and overcome the

hurdles of poverty. This is exactly why schools need to work with parents and provide opportunities for students to meet their varying needs at school.

In addition to sometimes lacking a healthy emotional foundation, poor households often have parents who do not value education and have a substandard education themselves. They may be unaware of the importance of promoting early literacy and number sense at an early age. This limits their children's cognitive development and places them at a significant disadvantage when entering school. In addition, children living in poverty experience a greater amount of acute stress in comparison to their affluent peers (Almeida, Neupert, Banks, & Serido, 2005). They are more likely to experience trauma from sexual or physical abuse, chronic violence, and neglect that can have a devastating effect on the physical, psychological, emotional and cognitive abilities of the student. This affects brain development, academic success and social competence of the child which creates significant barriers to experiencing success in school. Children who come from homes experiencing acute stress tend to channel that stress into disruptive behavior at school and disregard academic success (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002).

This study's findings are consistent with the argument that students living in poverty often have additional hurdles to cross before they will be able to have their needs met and find success in school. Schools need to continue to work to try and meet these needs since they impact whether or not the child has academic and behavioral success in school or not. The NYS Essential Elements provides a clear outline describing what programs and practices need to be in place to apply the New York State Essential Elements and the tools to reflect and measure the degree the Elements are implemented. Currently, the New York State Education Department identifies schools with low test scores as SINI (school in need of improvement) and persistently failing schools. These lists are shared with the public and the effect is that the schools are

publicly shamed. In addition, these schools receive less funding once they are identified by the State Education Department.

Several respondents point out that it does not cost additional money to implement significant portions of the Essential Elements. For example, it does not cost money to ensure every student has an adult mentor. It does not cost money for staff members to accept personal responsibility for the development of the whole child or to provide a safe, inviting, trusting and mutually respectful environment for all students to learn. However, it does cost money to maintain teaming, team planning, and after school programs. The study also found that while both schools with high needs implemented the Essential Elements to a higher degree, perhaps out of necessity, all schools must take a balanced approach to meeting both the academic and social needs of students in order to sustain student achievement. Implementing the Elements helped these schools help their students overcome the hurdles associated with living in poverty. As a result, they achieved in a similar manner to the average needs schools that implemented the Elements to a moderate or less than moderate degree. It is worth considering whether the two average need schools could have performed even better if they had implemented the Essential Elements to a higher degree. The school with the second highest degree of implementation of the Essential Elements performed the same as the school that had the lowest ratings, even though the former had 20% more students living in poverty.

This study further supports the belief that applying the NYS Essential Elements can help the majority of students living in poverty overcome the hurdles to achieve success in school. This is an excellent reason to apply the NYS Essential Elements. Ruby Payne's (2008) strategies to help students living in poverty achieve at a higher level begin with building a relationship of respect between the teacher and student. This means teachers need to insist on

high quality work, but provide the necessary support for students to achieve. Many other strategies that she recommends, such as increasing student vocabulary, relating the content to students whenever possible to make it more relevant, engaging students in their learning, monitoring a student's progress and providing interventions and supports as needed, and involving parents in school are all part of the NYS Essential Elements (Payne, 2008). These are all strategies referenced in NYS Essential Elements. Most teachers and all schools in the study apply these strategies to some extent, but the two schools who serve a higher proportion of students in poverty do so more explicitly and it appears with more success. Schools and individual teachers do a good job of working to provide the necessary supports for students to achieve success. Response to Intervention (RTI) teams from all four schools spoke about monitoring student progress and providing interventions and supports as needed.

Some students need social and emotional interventions to be effective before they are able to become successful learners. Strong, secure relationships help stabilize children's behavior in school. This is the goal of programs such as teaming, advisor/advisee, and mentoring (Flowers, Merten and Mulhall, 1999). These programs provide daily opportunities for students to interact socially with adults and peers in a positive manner, which helps students trying to learn healthy, appropriate emotional responses to everyday situations. Children living in poverty often lack these responses and need structured support and opportunities to discuss and learn about them in school. All students bring three things to school: the drive for reliable relationships, the strengthening of peer socialization, and the quest for importance and social status (Jensen, 2009).

This study adds to the research in support of having programs in place that that help meet the social and emotional needs of students. These should not be an afterthought by any school.

All students come to school with these needs so they must not be ignored. The NYS Essential Elements help schools to take a balanced approach to meeting the varying needs of students. Applying the NYS Essential Elements helps level the playing field for students who live in poverty.

Implications for Practice

Taking a Balanced Approach to Meeting the Needs of Students

This study sheds light on the balance schools must have in place to meet the academic, intellectual, social, and emotional needs of students. Since middle grade students, between the ages of 10-14, are undergoing turbulent physical, biological, and emotional changes, administrators and teachers need to be educated about research-based practices including the NYS Essential Elements in order to provide this balance. Counseling, mentoring, and advisory programs are just as critical to whether some students succeed as academic intervention services and the use of research-based instructional strategies. It helps if there is sufficient funding in place, but one school in the study proved they were able to make reductions to the budget while preserving teaming and team planning. The administration understood this research and made strategic decisions to preserve key programs along with regularly scheduled common team planning time. Using the NYS Essential Elements to advocate for the preservation of key programs may be an effective strategy to keep in mind when considering cutbacks. Administrators must know what they are losing when they make cutbacks or they will never be aware of the void the cutbacks create.

Making Time to Meet the Needs of Students

Time is often an issue when schools are trying to meet the varying needs of students. This study discussed using after-school programs to create additional opportunities for students

to connect with and enjoy school. After-school programs can also be a time for students to receive counseling or academic support. It is important to have these programs in place in order to support and connect students to the school in a positive manner. Durlak and Weisberg (2007) have shown that after-school programs that include a social and emotional learning component can lead to increased attendance rates, higher completion of homework, and fewer behavioral disruptions. Eventually these outcomes will lead to increased grade point averages and graduating students who are ready to take on the challenge of college or a career (New York City Government, 2013).

In addition, after school is a time when middle school students are often left unsupervised at home before their parents return from work. This is often the time when many middle grade students nationwide experiment with sex, drugs, and alcohol. Afterschool Alliance conducted a survey which found that more than one in five children are left unsupervised after school (New York City Government, 2014). By applying the NYS Essential Elements outside of the school day, schools are able to maintain the balance between focusing on the academic and social needs of students. Only half of the schools in the study provided after-school programs for students. Both schools provided students with transportation to take students home following the programs. This helps parents who are working or unable to provide transportation for the student to come home. The two schools that did not provide after-school programs had staff members who regretted not having the programs in place for students.

Administration Must Consider the Essential Elements when Making Budget Cutbacks

Conventional wisdom suggests that meeting the social and emotional needs of students is an “extra” that can only be sustained by school systems that have sufficient knowledge and resources to do so. This study turns this argument on its head, suggesting that schools that serve

the highest need students and that often have fewer resources, can least afford to neglect these needs. It is not uncommon that schools serving students with the highest needs often struggle to find the resources to support practices and programs to meet these needs.

This study also emphasizes the need for all superintendents and principals to be knowledgeable of research on the unique needs of students in the middle grades. This will allow them to consider the consequences better when making difficult decisions. Decreases in federal and state aid along with increasing costs have forced administrators to make difficult decisions. Knowledgeable administrators have a greater chance of supporting the teaching and application of the NYS Essential Elements during staff development time. Financial distress is an opportunity for administration to preserve programming by finding creative ways to provide the same programs at a reduced cost or by strategically making reductions to programs that have less of an impact on students and the school. In the face of financial distress, it is critical that school administrators analyze and prioritize items based on how they impact students, not just on how much they cost.

One of the four schools studied reduced counseling services and broke up team planning time by assigning middle grade teachers to teach high school courses. Staff survey results echoed administrative decisions that were not supportive of meeting the social and emotional needs of all students. Less than half felt counseling and guidance services were adequate when assisting students in making life, career, and educational services. Only 33% of the staff felt there was evidence of a culture of support for the educational and personal development of all students. Two-thirds of the staff believed that teams did not do an adequate job taking responsibility for the personal and social development of all students. Budgetary decisions made by administrators impact the culture of the organization. In this case administrative budgetary

decisions reflected reductions in the areas of counseling and teaming and the staff felt they were not able to adequately meet the social and emotional needs of students. Administrators have a responsibility to understand the research and the impact reductions will have on the school, prior to making decisions to reduce or eliminate programs. Whenever possible, there has to be a plan B to meet the needs of students when reductions to staffing and programs are made. It is not defensible to cut programs that meet the needs of students and not replace them with other programs or services to meet those needs.

Both the state and federal government have to begin to fully fund public schools if these schools are ever going to be able to reinstate or replace some of the valuable programs that were cut during this time. Schools also have to prioritize what is important to them and their students. Reductions that negatively impact the emotional health of students will have detrimental effects on the students and their ability to achieve academically. Academic interventions stayed in place when funding was reduced because they were mandated. Public schools in NYS do not need any more unfunded mandates, but many would welcome a funded mandate to maintain adequate counseling and advisory programs. Greater consideration must be given to the emotional health of students to maintain a balanced effort when attempting to meet the needs of students.

Implications for Policy

Revise How Schools, Administrators and Teachers Are Evaluated

This study focused on measuring the degree four schools applied the NYS Essential Elements and the impact this may have on each school. The tools are available to evaluate schools, principals and teachers based on whether or not they implement the Essential Elements. Schools, teachers and students are currently evaluated by using high stakes tests. If schools do

not perform well on these tests, they will be identified as Schools In Need of Improvement, which can result in a takeover of the school by the state. Before that occurs, financial aid is cut, which too often leads to cuts in support programs for the students. Teachers who receive poor test scores are placed on a Teacher Improvement Plan and can be terminated for having consecutive years of poor test scores.

The approach the Governor of New York is recommending suggests that tests can determine the effectiveness of a school, administrator, or teacher. This is simply not true. These tests are flawed and subject to various errors. They are also narrow measures of what a student can do. Statisticians, psychometricians, and economists who have studied the use of test scores for high stakes testing evaluations mostly concur that such use should be pursued with great caution. “There is not strong evidence to indicate either that the departing teachers would actually be the weakest teachers, or that the departing teachers would be replaced by more effective ones. There is also little or no evidence for the claim that teachers will be more motivated to improve student learning if teachers are evaluated or monetarily rewarded for student test score gains” (Rothstein, Ladd, Ravitch, Baker, Barton, Darling-Hammond, Haertel, Linn, Shavelson and Shepardn, 2010).

Over reliance on standardized testing to evaluate students, teachers and principals is not a fair or valid means to evaluate educators. Currently, the New York State Education Department employs teams of experts to identify schools that have been successful implementing the NYS Essential Elements. This study suggests that the New York State Education Department should place less emphasis on standardized test scores and instead evaluate all schools as a means to help them improve the degree they implement the NYS Essential Elements. Standardized testing could still count as 20% of the evaluation process for a school, teacher, or administrator, and

another 60% would come from classroom observations, but the remaining 20% would be based on how the building is rated by an independent team using the criteria found in the NYS Essential Elements Rubrics. Teams hired and trained by the New York State Education Department could use the rubric and rating materials designed by NYSED and the New York State Middle School Association to rate all middle level schools and programs. The evaluation of the school would result in a two-year action plan of improvement with specific check points to measure the progress the building is making.

Limitations of this Study and Recommendations for Future Research

Studying four schools in the Western New York area allowed me to study each school in depth. However, it was a limitation because the number of schools studied was too small and not representative of all middle schools either demographically, geographically, or economically. Areas of future study would most certainly include expanding on these efforts to include more schools in the study. A larger study would include a larger sample size and more representative of schools and participants. The larger scope may reveal greater insight and perhaps different results or it may further validate this study. It may also allow researchers to make broader generalizations. Currently, this study provides insight into four rural schools, the degree in which they applied the NYS Essential Elements, and the impact this had on the NYS 8th grade ELA and math standardized test scores.

The small number of middle school staff in this study precluded me from using statistical tests of significance to distinguish differences among the four schools. Using interview as well as survey data to draw these contrasts provided some assurances that the conclusions about each statement were valid, but studies of more and larger schools would bolster confidence in overall

conclusions. Using a basic descriptive analysis provided me with some excellent insight into each school and the degree they are applying the Essential Elements.

Future studies could also further explore the essential elements. What process does a smaller school follow to implement the essential elements versus a larger school? The study would provide insight into the way small and large schools shape their cultures, practices, and beliefs. What impact does having a designated middle school principal, who is knowledgeable of the essential elements, have on the culture and achievement scores? What are the culture and achievements scores for schools that have worked to apply, measure, reflect and re-apply the essential elements over a period of years versus other schools that have not applied the essential elements? What would happen if the state invested in failing schools to provide students living in poverty with the resources to support their academic, social and emotional development in a similar manner as their well to do peers receive for ten years? During the ten years the school would implement the essential elements to the highest degree. How would this impact student achievement, behavior, graduation rates and success beyond high school?

In order to measure the effect of implementing the NYS Essential Elements it would be ideal to study how schools do or do not address the essential elements and the impact, if any, that would have on their culture and student achievement results. One of the limitations of this study is that it is a snap shot of each school and it does not provide a detailed analysis of how each school did or did not change its practices. The study addresses the extent of the essential elements implementation in each school and only indirectly the process of implementation. More studies of the implementation process are clearly needed.

It would also be interesting to study a school that had not made significant improvements and is considered a failing school based on New York State test results. The first step would be

to measure the degree they are implementing the NYS Essential Elements currently to establish a baseline. The next step would be to implement programs and practices that enable the successful school to implement the NYS Essential Elements to a high degree in accordance with the NYS Essential Elements Rubric. Following a two year transition, it would be ideal to measure the effect on student achievement as well as measure the overall ability of the school to meet the needs of each student. It would be interesting to measure the effect implementing the NYS Essential Elements had on the culture of the building. Full funding for such a school would enable us to measure the full impact of implementing the NYS Essential Elements to a high degree. It would be beneficial to measure the impact of the attitudes for both the staff and students.

Some of those interviewed for this study believed the NYS Essential Elements would transfer well at the elementary and secondary levels. This study does not focus on any other levels. While some of the elements are currently applied at other levels, it would be interesting to study all of them at other levels and measure the impact of their presence or absence on student achievement and school culture. The NYS Essential Elements are designed to meet what are thought to be special needs of middle school students so it would be interesting to measure their impact when applied at the elementary or secondary level.

This study was not designed to isolate the different elements or determine whether some are more essential than others. Another study of interest would be to apply the elements across a large group of schools. It would be interesting to begin to look at the different elements and their separate as well as combined impact or lack of impact on student achievement and school culture. Which Elements or combination of elements would have the greatest impact on academic achievement and school culture?

My study provides some evidence that leaders who know middle level research and are familiar with the principles found within the NYS Essential Elements are more likely to make decisions that further implement the NYS Essential Elements. It would be interesting to study if there is a relationship between the degree to which schools with middle level grades are implementing the Essential Elements and the perceived importance of middle level research by the Superintendent and the Board of Education. This study supports the idea that a lack of financial support for aspects of the Essential Elements such as after school programs and common team planning will result in the elimination of both. Principals have input about the budget but they do not make final decisions. It is the Superintendent, Board of Education and Business Manager who determine what priorities are funded. Therefore, it is important to find out how Superintendents and Boards of Education perceive the Essential Elements and middle level education. It may also be beneficial for middle level organizations to increase their focus on educating Superintendents and Boards of Education about the benefits of applying the Essential Elements.

Final Thoughts

All students need a school that meets both their academic and developmental needs. The NYS Essential Elements serve as one of many tools that allow middle grade leaders to evaluate their programs and practices along with their ability to meet the varying needs of all students. In theory, implementing these research based middle grade reforms will create a culture in which every adult feels responsible for both the academic and personal development of every student. The school will be structured to meet the needs of students beginning by having teams whose members have common team planning time. Schools that take this balanced approach to educating students develop the whole child and prepare them for success in life after school.

In this study the high needs school that implemented the NYS Essential Elements to the highest degree outperformed the average needs school that implemented the Elements to the least degree among the four schools in spite of the high needs school having 20% more students living in poverty. The study supports the idea that having the practices and programs in place to meet the social and emotional needs of students should be a requirement instead of an option for all middle schools. All schools whether they are rich or poor need to implement the Essential Elements in order to meet the unique needs of other students. Paying attention to social and emotional needs may play a more critical role in schools with students with high needs. Meeting these needs cannot be an afterthought. Schools must take a balanced approach to meeting the social and emotional needs sometimes before they can ever address the academic needs of a student.

Meeting the varying needs of students takes a commitment of time. Time is always an important factor in any school initiative. This study contributed to the research that supports the importance of middle schools making the time to address the varying needs of students whether it is through making time for common team planning, home base and mentoring programs at the start of the school day, end of the day or after school. Schools that don't schedule these programs properly will lack the organization and structure to fully implement the Essential Elements.

Administrators and teacher leaders are responsible for making sure the district and their school are working to meet the needs of students. In order to do this effectively at the middle school grades they must have knowledge of the Essential Elements and the needs of middle school students. The study suggests that knowledge of the Essential Elements may help inform decisions when a district must make reductions to the school budget. The options that require

money are more likely to be given priority if their contributions to student learning are fully appreciated. Not all aspects of the Essential Elements require money to implement, many of them such as mentoring and advisor programs simply require planning, time and commitment. If administrators and teacher leaders are not familiar with the needs of middle school students they may not preserve the practices and programs that help meet the needs of their students when they need to make reductions to the school budget. All four schools in the study struggled to make adjustments as state aid was reduced. However, one of the four high needs schools did not cut teaming, team planning, after school programs or mentoring programs. The high performing school chose to not reduce these programs due to the negative impact it would have on their students. This was also the administrative team that was fully knowledgeable of the Essential Elements.

Middle schools can be an afterthought for many school districts. Elementary schools gain a lot of attention because they provide the foundation for learning and parents are still very involved in the educational process. High schools gain positive attention from the many accolades and accomplishments of their students who graduate and go on to college or who excel in academics. Since high schools represent the culminating program for all school districts they often receive more support and attention. However, middle schools are often treated like a middle child in a family. If you don't hear them or notice them, all is well. School districts need to continue to reflect on and evaluate their programs and practices at the middle level. During the middle school years students begin to form their opinions about themselves and the complicated world around them. This is also the time when students begin to experiment with sex, drugs and alcohol. The middle school years are riddled with physical and emotional changes that often result in a lot of frustration on the part of a student. Schools that have the

Middle School Essential Elements in place are better equipped to deal with this drama as it plays out. They are more likely to meet the needs of their students and enable more of them to become successful learners and responsible and productive young adults.

The current discourse in education focuses primarily on academics and using high stakes tests to evaluate the value of a teacher, principal or school. Hopefully, this study will further contribute to the counter narrative that there are other ways of assessing schools than high stakes testing. Schools and evaluation systems that do not consider the culture of the school or the programs and practices that help meet the varying social and emotional needs of students are not reflective of what students really want and need. If we cannot help our children meet their own social and emotional needs they will never experience a high level of academic success. The NYS Essential Elements provide a clear model of the programs and practices that need to be in place to meet the varying needs of middle school students. It is time for these practices to be embraced by federal and state education departments across the country and by educators at the district level.

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Survey Consent

Participation in the study is completely voluntary. You may choose to participate or not without any penalty, and if you do begin the survey, you may decide not to continue at any time. Your identity will not be revealed whether or not you choose to participate in the survey. Your privacy will be maintained in all published and written data resulting from the study.

If you have any questions regarding the survey please contact me at 716-982-7797 or email me at root@fillmorecsd.org. My thesis advisor is Dr. Joseph Shedd, at 315-443-1468, email jshedd@syr.edu, or Syracuse University Institutional Review Board at 315-443-3013 or 121 Bowne Hall, Syracuse University, Syracuse, NY 13244.

If you have no further questions, and wish to participate in the survey, please click, yes I will participate in the survey below or click on, no I will not participate in the survey below.

1. After reading the consent statement above I

☐ Will participate in the survey

☐ Will not participate in the survey

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Middle School Program Survey

Middle School Program Survey

2. Does your school mission statement explicitly reference BOTH the academic and personal needs of children?

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ We don't have a mission statement

3. How much are each of these characteristics a focus for your school as a whole?

	Exclusive Focus	Primary Focus	Less of a Focus	
Academic	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Social	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ethical	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Physical	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Emotional	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

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4. To what extent would the staff commit to each statement as a responsibility of your school?

	All or almost all staff committed.	More than half of the staff committed.	Approximately half of the staff committed.	Less than half the staff committed.	No/few staff committed.
Accepting - individually and collectively - responsibility for the educational and personal development of each and every student.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Connecting each young adolescent in positive ways with the school and with caring adults within the school.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Developing the whole child, intellectually, academically, personally, socially, physically, emotionally, and ethically.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ensuring for each student a safe, inviting, trusting, and mutually-respectful learning environment that offers both physical and psychological safety.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Establishing partnerships with the home and the community.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Providing a successful transition from the elementary grades to the middle grades to the high school grades and from childhood to adolescence.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Providing each student with a variety of learning experiences that are academically challenging, developmentally appropriate, and personally relevant in order for each of them to make informed educational and personal decisions.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Working together to ensure that all students achieve at high levels and, with appropriate guidance and structure, develop independence and responsibility.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

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5. Describe the extent of implementation that a visitor would observe on any given day for each of these qualities:

	Observable almost all of the time thoroughout the school	Regularly observable in more than half the school.	Regularly observable in half the school.	Regularly observable in less than half the school	No or very little observable is noted.
A common set of learning skills (e.g., how to study, how to conduct research, how to read for understanding, how to take notes, etc.) is in place across all grades and subject areas and taught and reinforced in each grade and subject area.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The overall program emphasizes not only intellectual development but also personal, social, physical, and ethical development.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The program emphasizes inter-disciplinary connections, and promotes shared responsibility for the standards among all content areas.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The program writing and mathematics (literacy and numeracy) across the subject areas with expectations for performance that are consistent across and within the disciplines and commonly understood by teachers, students, and parents.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The program engages and involves the family, local community, and the world outside school in the education and personal development of young adolescents.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The program includes diagnostic/benchmark assessments (similar in design to the State's	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

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assessments) that regularly and routinely monitor the learning of each student relative to the State's standards and community expectations.

The program is articulated with the elementary feeder schools and with the secondary receiving schools, building on the foundational knowledge and skills of the elementary grades and, in doing so, preparing students for success in high school.

☐☐☐☐☐

The program is explicitly articulated vertically and horizontally, within and across the various curricular areas, learning standards, and grade levels.

☐☐☐☐☐

The program is thoroughly challenging, rigorous, and purposeful.

☐☐☐☐☐

The program offers opportunities for the development of personal responsibility and self direction.

☐☐☐☐☐

The program provides targeted and timely academic intervention services that are based upon a careful assessment of the academic, social, and emotional needs of students at risk of not meeting the State's learning standards.

☐☐☐☐☐

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Middle School Program Survey

6. Please rate the extent to which the regular work of the interdisciplinary teams agrees with these statements:

	Almost always	More than half the time	Approximately half the time	Less than half the time	Never happens
Interdisciplinary teams use an agenda for their meetings.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Interdisciplinary teams focus on curriculum and instruction.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Interdisciplinary teams employ common strategies and expectations.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Interdisciplinary teams plan special events for their students.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Interdisciplinary teams focus on the behavior of their students.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Interdisciplinary teams focus on the social and emotional needs of their students.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Interdisciplinary teams coordinate curricula.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Interdisciplinary teams coordinate assignments and assessments.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Interdisciplinary teams have common planning time.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

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7. To what extent does each of these statements describe the teaching staff?

	Are consistently caring and respectful in their interactions with students and with other adults.	Have a deep understanding of their subject matter, of different approaches to student learning, and of diverse teaching techniques.	Provide instruction that is consistently standards-based, challenging, rigorous, and purposeful.	Thoroughly know and understand the needs and developmental characteristics of young adolescents.
All or almost all staff	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
More than half of staff	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Approximately half the staff	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Less than half the staff	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
None or very few of staff	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

8. Please rate the extent to which a visitor would observe each of these instructional strategies on a typical day in your classroom as well as other classrooms around the building:

	Lecture instruction	Whole-class instruction	Guided reading groups	Inquiry-based lab experiences	Follow-the-directions lab experiences	Cooperative groups	Student-to-student discussion	Literature circles/reading clubs	Tiered assignments	Differentiated assignments	Student choice	Peer tutoring	Reading and/or writing workshop
Almost always	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
More than half the time	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Approximately half the time	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Less than half the time	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never / almost never happens	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

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9. Please rate the extent to which you use each of these approaches on typical assessments:

	Almost always	More than half the time	Approximately half the time	Less than half the time	Never/Almost never happens
Demonstration	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Document Based Questions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Essay and written response	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Multiple Choice	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Portfolio Based Assessment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Practicing format of state test	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Presentation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Project Based	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Other (please specify)

10. Please rate your use of each communication strategy with parents/families:

	Printed, school-wide report cards.	Written, regular progress reports.	Student-led conferences.	Phone calls home (not for disciplinary reasons)	Parent-teacher conferences	Printed, school-wide progress reports	Web-based system with home access	Written, occasional progress reports	Parent-team conferences
Almost always	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
More than half the time	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Approximately half the time	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Less than half the time	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never / Almost never happens	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Other (please specify)

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11. How does your school rate in the following areas?

	No evidence; no indication of any implementation efforts	Trace evidence; a few indications of pre-implementation efforts	Minimal evidence; limited indications of initial implementation efforts	Some evidence; several indications of recently begun, broad-based, systemic implementation efforts	Considerable evidence; multiple indications of long-term, broad-based, systemic implementation efforts	Extensive evidence; numerous, compelling indications of significantly broad and deep implementation	Conclusive evidence; widespread, indisputable indications of full and complete implementation
Connecting each young adolescent in positive ways with the school and with caring adults within the school	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Be structured to create close, sustained relationships between students and teachers.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have teacher teams sharing responsibility for the education and personal development of a common group of students	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Create, promote, and sustain a school culture of mutual support and collective responsibility for the educational and personal development of each and every young adolescent	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Counseling and guidance services to assist students in making life, career, and educational choices	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Collaborate and cooperate in planning and providing professional training and staff development opportunities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Emphasizes not only intellectual development but also personal/social development	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

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12. Which statement best describes the use of the NYS Learning Standards by the predominance of teachers in your school? (choose one)

- ☐ All planning begins with the standards, with assessments and activities following directly from the standards.
- ☐ Teachers make adjustments to their lesson in order to align them to the standards.
- ☐ Teachers continue to use pre-existing lessons and units and reference the standards (identifying which standards are hit).
- ☐ The standards prompted little changes in lesson and unit planning.
- ☐ The standards had no impact on our school.

13. Please rate the extent of student participation in the following programs in your school:

	Almost all students participate	More than half of all students participate	Approximately half of the students participate	Less than half of the students participate	Few students participate	The program is not offered at our school
Extracurricular sports for 7th and/or 8th graders.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Clubs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Informal after school extra help with teachers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Formal school sponsored after school programs that support students	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
AIS After School Programs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Coordinated service learning opportunities.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

14. Does your school have interdisciplinary teams?

- ☐ Yes. ☐ No (skip the remaining questions in this section).

15. In a typical week, how often do your interdisciplinary teams meet?

- ☐ Five Times
- ☐ Four Times
- ☐ Three Times
- ☐ Two Times
- ☐ One Time
- ☐ Teams do not meet

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16. What is the extent of academic and personal support available for students?

	No evidence; no indication of any implementation efforts	Trace evidence; a few indications of pre-implementation efforts	Minimal evidence; limited indications of initial implementation efforts	Some evidence; several indications of recently begun, broad-based, systemic implementation efforts	Considerable evidence; multiple indications of long-term, broad-based, systemic implementation efforts	Extensive evidence; numerous, compelling indications of significantly broad and pervasive implementation	Conclusive evidence; widespread, indisputable indications of full and complete implementation
Adults and older youth serve as positive role models	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Positive behaviors are recognized and affirmed	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Respect and caring engender a feeling of self-worth, self-confidence, and personal efficacy among students	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Staff and students have opportunities to examine, explore, discuss, and understand the changes associated with early adolescence	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Counseling and guidance services assist students in making life, career, and educational choices	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A network of trained professionals, special programs, and community resources are available to assist those who have extraordinary needs and require additional services to cope with the changes of early adolescence and/or the academic demands of middle-level education	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
An adult mentor is available to students either formally through a teacher/student, advisor/advisee program or informally through a school culture of caring in which teachers or other adults assume responsibility for individual students	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

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17. What degree of professional training and development are available in your school?

	No evidence; no indication of any implementation efforts	Trace evidence; a few indications of pre-implementation efforts	Minimal evidence; limited indications of initial implementation efforts	Some evidence; several indications of recently begun, broad-based, systemic implementation efforts	Considerable evidence; multiple indications of long-term, broad-based, systemic implementation efforts	Extensive evidence; numerous, compelling indications of significantly broad and deep implementation	Conclusive evidence; widespread, indisputable indications of full and complete implementation
Principal and teachers know the needs and characteristics of students in the middle grades and the instructional strategies and techniques that work for these students	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Staff have high expectations for all students	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Teachers have opportunities to learn about and understand their subject matter, course curriculum, and instructional strategies	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Teachers participate in professional training and staff development opportunities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
School has taken a proactive approach to provide training in Common Core Standards	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Appendix B

Aligning Survey Questions with Elements

***If two Elements are listed at the end of a question, it is because there are multiple questions within each question and sometimes these questions align with different elements.**

- 1-Will you participate in the survey?
- 2-Does your school mission refer to and include both academic and personal needs? – El. 1
- 3-How much is each area a focus 1-3 exclusive, primary, or less? – El. 2
- 4-To what extent would staff commit to each statement? Connecting with each student, accepting all students individual differences 0-5? Range of answers - All committed to no few committed – EL 2/5
5. Describe the extent that a visitor would see the following? EL 2
6. Please rate the extent that interdisciplinary teams do the following? El. 3
7. To what extent do each of these describe the teaching staff? EL. 6
8. Please rate the extent an observer would see these instructional strategies in your classroom. EL. 4
9. Please rate the extent you use each approach to assessments? El. 4
10. Please rate your use of communication strategy with parents – EL 6
11. How does your school rate in the following areas? El 6/5
12. Which statement best describes the use of the NYS Learning Standards in your building? El 4
13. Please rate the extent of participation by students in the following after school programs. El. 6
14. Does your school have interdisciplinary teams? El. 3
15. In a typical week, how often do your interdisciplinary teams meet? El. 3
16. What is the extent of personal and academic support at your school? El 6/5
17. What degree of professional development and training are available at your school? El 7/5

Element	Description	Number of Questions
1	Philosophy and Mission	6
2	Educational Program	10
3	Organization and Structure	16
4	Classroom Instruction	18
5	Educational Leadership	14
6	Network of Academic/Personal Support	6
7	Professional Training/Staff Development	8

The rating scale for each question was:

- 1-Low degree of implementation of the Elements
- 2-Average degree of implementation of the Elements
- 3-High degree of implementation of the Elements

APPENDIX C

Summary Data Comparison – Conversion of Raw Data to % data

KEY - Blue / Walnut Hill, Red / Oak Hill, Gold / Pine Hill, White / Maple Hill

1. Will you participate in the survey. 100% Yes

2. Does your school mission statement explicitly reference BOTH the academic and personal needs of children?

Blue – 88% Yes 12% No

Red – 100% Yes

Gold – 100% Yes

White – 78% Yes, 22% We don't have a mission statement

Mean – 92, St. Dev. 10.6

3. How much are each of these characteristics a focus for your school as a whole?

Academic Blue – 78% Exclusive Focus, 22% -Primary, Less of a Focus 0%

Academic Red – 100% Primary or Exclusive

Academic White – 100% Primary or Exclusive

Academic Gold - 100% Primary or Exclusive

Blue Social and Emotional – 61% Less of a Focus, Ethical Blue – 50% less of a focus, Physical – 53% less of a focus

Red Social – 20% Ethical – 40%, Physical – 60% - Emotional – 20% - Less of a focus

White – 42% Social and Physical Less of a focus, Ethical Less of a focus-57%, Emotional Less of a focus -29%

GOLD – Social -12.5 Ethical -50% Emotional – 50% Physical – 55% Less of a focus

4. To what extent would the staff commit to each statement as a responsibility of your school?

Accepting - individually and collectively - responsibility for the educational and personal development of each and every student.

Blue -

All or almost all staff committed.	More than half of the staff committed.	Approximately half of the staff committed.	Less than half the staff committed.	No/few staff committed.
B78% R-80	R-20			B0% R-0%

G 22% W-100%
G-56% G-22%

Connecting each young adolescent in positive ways with the school and with caring adults within the school.

All or almost all staff committed.	More than half of the staff committed.	Approximately half of the staff committed.	Less than half the staff committed.	No/few staff committed.
B-78%			B-0%	
R-80		R-20%		
	W-67%	W-33%		
G0%	G-56	G-44%		

Developing the whole child, intellectually, academically, personally, socially, physically, emotionally, and ethically.

All or almost all staff committed.	More than half of the staff committed.	Approximately half of the staff committed.	Less than half the staff committed.	No/few staff committed.
B-55%	B-38%		B-11%	
R-80	R-20%			
	W-67%	W- 16%		
G 33	G-33	G-33		

Ensuring for each student a safe, inviting, t both physical and psychological safety.

All or almost all staff committed.	More than half of the staff committed.	Approximately half of the staff committed.	Less than half the staff committed.	No/few staff committed.
B 72%			B-0%	
R-80	R-20%			
	W-67%	W33%		
G-44%	G22	G33		

Establishing partnerships with the home and the community.

All or almost all staff committed.	More than half of the staff committed.	Approximately half of the staff committed.	Less than half the staff committed.	No/few staff committed.
B22			B-17%	
R-60	R-20	R-20		
	W-50%	W-33		
G 22	G-11	G-44	G-22	

Providing a successful transition from the elementary grades to the middle grades to the high school
gXZ{}+_b-44% B-17%

R-40
G56

R-40
W-50
G33

W-16%
G11

Providing each student with a variety of learning experiences that are academically challenging, developmentally appropriate, and personally relevant in order for each of them to make informed educational and personal decisions.

All or almost all staff committed.	More than half of the staff committed.	Approximately half of the staff committed.	Less than half the staff committed.	No/few staff committed.
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B-55%
R-40
G-44

R-60%
W-50
G-44

W-33
G-44

B-5.5%

Working together to ensure that all students achieve at high levels and, with appropriate guidance and structure, develop independence and responsibility.

All or almost all staff committed.	More than half of the staff committed.	Approximately half of the staff committed.	Less than half the staff committed.	No/few staff committed.
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B-61%

B- 0%

R-40

R-60%

W-33 W-17%

G11 G56 G33

5. Describe the extent of implementation that a visitor would observe on any given day for each of these qualities:

A common set of learning skills (e.g., how to study, how to conduct research, how to read for understanding, how to take notes, etc.) is in place across all grades and subject areas and taught and reinforced in each grade and subject area.

Observable almost all of the time throughout the school	Regularly observable in more than half the school.	Regularly observable in half the school.	Regularly observable in less than half the school	No or very little observable is noted.	Rating Average	Response Count
Observable almost all of	Regularly observable in more than	Regularly observable in half the	Regularly observable in less than half	No or very little observable is	Rating Average	Response Count

the time thoroughout the school	half the school.	school.	the school	noted.	
B-22	B-33	B-17	B-11	B-3-17	
R-0	R-60	R-40	R-0		
W-0	W-43	W-29	W-14	W-14	
G-0	G-56	G-22	G22		

The overall program emphasizes not only intellectual development but also personal, social, physical, and ethical development.

Observable almost all of the time thoroughout the school	Regularly observable in more than half the school.	Regularly observable in half the school.	Regularly observable in less than half the school	No or very little observable is noted.	Rating Average	Response Count
B- 33	B-33	B-28	B-6			
R-60	R-40					
W-0	W-43	W-29	W-14	W-14		
G-44	G-33	G-22				

The program emphasizes inter-disciplinary connections, and promotes shared responsibility for the standards among all content areas.

Observable almost all of the time throughout the school	Regularly observable in more than half the school.	Regularly observable in half the school.	Regularly observable in less than half the school	No or very little observable is noted.	Rating Average	Response Count
B-28	B-33	B-22	B6	B-11		
R-60	R-20	R-0	R-20			
W-0	W-43	W-29	W-29			
G-11	G-44	G-0	G-44			

The program writing and mathematics (literacy and numeracy) across the subject areas with expectations for performance that are consistent across and within the disciplines and commonly understood by teachers, students, and parents.

Observable almost all of the time throughout the school	Regularly observable in more than half the school.	Regularly observable in half the school.	Regularly observable in less than half the school	No or very little observable is noted.	Rating Average	Response Count
B-33	B-17	B-22	B-17	B-6		
R-40	R-40	R-20				
W-14	W-29	W-29	W-29			
G-11	G-44	G-0	G-33	G-11		

The program engages and involves the family, local community, and the world outside school in the education and personal development of young adolescents.

Observable almost all of the time throughout the school	Regularly observable in more than half the school.	Regularly observable in half the school.	Regularly observable in less than half the school	No or very little observable is noted.	Rating Average	Response Count
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B-17	B-33	B-22	B-22	B-6
R-20	R-60	R-0	R-20	
W-0	W-43	W-14	W-43	
G-0	G-33	G-33	G-22	G-11

The program includes diagnostic/benchmark assessments (similar in design to the State's assessments) that regularly and routinely monitor the learning of each student relative to the State's standards and community expectations.

Observable almost all of the time throughout the school	Regularly observable in more than half the school.	Regularly observable in half the school.	Regularly observable in less than half the school	No or very little observable is noted.	Rating Average	Response Count
B-39	B-22	B-11	B-11	B-17		
R-80	R-20					
W-14	W-43	W-29	W-14			
G-11	G-22	G-22	G-44			

The program is articulated with the elementary feeder schools and with the secondary receiving schools, building on the foundational knowledge and skills of the elementary grades and, in doing so, preparing students for success in high school.

Observable almost all of the time throughout the school	Regularly observable in more than half the school.	Regularly observable in half the school.	Regularly observable in less than half the school	No or very little observable is noted.	Rating Average	Response Count
B-17	B-33	B-22	B-11	B-17		
R-80			R-20			
W-0	W-43	W-29	W-29			
G-22	G-33	G-11	G-22	G-11		

The program is explicitly articulated vertically and horizontally, within and across the various curricular areas, learning standards, and grade levels.

Observable almost all of the time throughout the school	Regularly observable in more than half the school.	Regularly observable in half the school.	Regularly observable in less than half the school	No or very little observable is noted.	Rating Average	Response Count
B-17	B-28	B-22	B-22	B-11		
R-20	R-60	R-20				
W-0	W-43	W-14	W-43			
G-22	G-22	G-11	G-33	G-11		

The program is thoroughly challenging, rigorous, and purposeful.

Observable almost all of the time throughout the school	Regularly observable in more than half the school.	Regularly observable in half the school.	Regularly observable in less than half the school	No or very little observable is noted.	Rating Average	Response Count
B-44	B-33	B-22				
R-40	R-40	R-20				
W-0	W-57	W-29	W-14			
G-0	G-55	G-33	G-11			

The program offers opportunities for the development of personal responsibility and self direction.

Observable almost all of the time throughout the school	Regularly observable in more than half the school.	Regularly observable in half the school.	Regularly observable in less than half the school	No or very little observable is noted.	Rating Average	Response Count
B-28	B-33	B-33	B-0	B-6		
R-60	R-20	R-20				
W-0	W-43	W-14	W-43			
G-11	G-33	G-33	G-11	G-11		

The program provides targeted and timely academic intervention services that are based upon a careful assessment of the academic, social, and emotional needs of students at risk of not meeting the State's learning standards.

Observable almost all of the time throughout the school	Regularly observable in more than half the school.	Regularly observable in half the school.	Regularly observable in less than half the school	No or very little observable is noted.	Rating Average	Response Count
B-39	B-22	B-28	B-6	B-6		
R-80		R-20				
W-0	W-71	W-14	W-14			
G-0	G-44	G-22	G-33			

6. Please rate the extent to which the regular work of the interdisciplinary teams agrees with these statements:

Almost always	More than half the time	Approximately half the time	Less than half the time	Never happens
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Interdisciplinary teams use an agenda for their meetings.

B-7%	B-20	B-0	B-27	B-47
R-20	R-20	R-0	R-20	R-40
W-89	W-0	W-11	W-0	W-0
G-14	G-14	G-33	G-22	G-0

Interdisciplinary teams focus on curriculum and instruction.

B-13	B-27	B-7	B-27	B-27
R-20	R-40	R-20	R-20	R-0
W-11	W-67	W-22	W-0	W-0
G-14	G-43	G-29	G-14	

Interdisciplinary teams employ common strategies and expectations.

B-20	B-20	B-20	B-13	B-27
R-40	R-40	R-20		
W-22	W-78	W-0	W-0	
G-14	G-29	G-57		

Interdisciplinary teams plan special events for their students.

B-7	B-7	B-13	B-20	B-47
R-40	R-20	R-40		
W-22	W-56	W-0	W-22	
G-0	G-29	G-29	G-43	

Interdisciplinary teams focus on the behavior of their students.

B-27	B-20	B-0	B-33	B-20
R-80	R-20			
W-56	W-33	W-11		
G-14	G-57	G-29		

Interdisciplinary teams focus on the social and emotional needs of their students.

B-13	B-13	B-7	B-33	B-27
R-80	R-20			
W-44	W-44	W-11		
G-14	G-29	G-57		

Interdisciplinary teams coordinate curricula.

B-13	B-20	B-7	B-33	B-27
R-60	R-0	R-20	R-20	
W-0	W-11	W-44	W-44	
G-14	G-29	G-43	G-14	G-0

Interdisciplinary teams coordinate assignments and assessments.

B-0	B-27	B-7	B-20	B-40
R-20	R-20	R-40	R-20	
W-33	W-22	W-22	W-22	
G-14	G-29	G-29	G-29	G-0

Interdisciplinary teams have common planning time.

B-20	B-20	B-0	B-30	B-20
R-20	R-20	R-0	R-20	R-40
W-78	W-22	W-0	W-11	
G-29	G-43	G-14	G-14	

7. To what extent does each of these statements describe the teaching staff?

	All or almost all staff	More than half of staff	Approximately half the staff	Less than half the staff	None or very few of staff
Are consistently caring and respectful in their interactions with students and with other adults	B-82% R-67 W-25 G-0	B-18% R-33 W-63 G-83	B-0 R- W-13 G-17	B-0 R- W- G-	B-0 R- W- G-
Have a deep understanding of their subject matter, of different approaches to student learning, and of diverse teaching techniques.	B-44 R-50 W-63 G-20	B-38 R-33 W-37 G-20	B-13 R-17 W- G-60	B-6 R- W- G-	B- R- W- G-
Provide instruction that is consistently standards-based, challenging, rigorous and purposeful.	B-50 R-50 W-37 G-0	B-38 R-33 W-50 G-60	B-6 R-17 W-13 G-40	B-6 R- W- G-	B- R- W- G-
Thoroughly know and understand the needs and developmental characteristics of young adolescents.	B-38 R-60 W-37 G-20	B-31 R-40 W-63 G-40	B-19 R- W- G-40	B-6 R- W- G-	B-6 R- W- G-

8. Please rate the extent to which a visitor would observe each of these instructional strategies on a typical day in your classroom as well as other classrooms around the building.

	Lecture	Whole-class instruction	Guided reading groups	Inquiry-based lab experiences	Follow-the-directions lab experiences	Cooperative groups	Student-to-student discussion
Almost Always	B-19	B-33	B-7	B-6	B-13	B-20	B-25
More than half the time	B-38	B-27	B-33	B-25	B-19	B-33	B-19
Approximately half the time	B-25	B-33	B-20	B-25	B-19	B-27	B-25
Less than half the time	B-19	B-7	B-40	B-25	B-31	B-20	B-25
Never/Almost never happens	B-0	B-0	B-0	B-19	B-19	B-0	B-6
Almost Always	R-20	R-20	R-0	R-0	R-0	R-0	R-40
More than half the time	R-20	R-40	R-0	R-0	R-25	R-40	R-20
Approximately half the time	R-20	R-0	R-75	R-50	R-50	R-20	R-0
Less than half the time	R-20	R-40	R-25	R-50	R-0	R-40	R-20
Never/Almost never happens	R-20	R-0	R-0	R-0	R-25	R-0	R-20
Almost Always	W-0	W-44	W-11	W-0	W-0	W-11	W-11
More than half the time	W-44	W-56	W-0	W-0	W-11	W-33	W-33
Approximately half the time	W-22	W-0	W-44	W-22	W-11	W-22	W-22
Less than half the time	W-22	W-0	W-22	W-44	W-33	W-22	W-11
Never/Almost never happens	W-11	W-0	W-22	W-33	W-33	W-11	W-22

Almost Always	G-14	G-33	G-0	G-0	G-14	G-0	G-0
More than half the time	G-43	G-33	G-29	G-13	G-0	G-57	G-29
Approximately half the time	G-29	G-33	G-43	G-25	G-29	G-29	G-14
Less than half the time	G-14	G-0	G-14	G-37	G-0	G-14	G-57
Never/Almost never happens	G-14	G-0	G-14	G-25	G-57	G-0	G-0

9. Please rate the extent to which you use each of these approaches on typical assessments:

	Almost always	More than half the time	Approximately half the time	Less than half the time	Never/Almost never happens
Demonstration	B-50	B-25	B-0	B-25	B-25
Document Based Questions	B-0	B-25	B-19	B-31	B-25
Essay and written response	B-31	B-25	B-25	B-6	B-13
Multiple Choice	B-25	B-31	B-13	B-19	B-13
Portfolio Based Assessment	B-7	B-7	B-13	B-20	B-53
Practicing format of state test	B-20	B-25	B-7	B-13	B-33
Presentation	B-27	B-13	B-13	B-33	B-13
Project Based	B-13	B-27	B-13	B-33	B-13
Demonstration	R-40	R-40	R-0	R-0	R-20
Document Based Questions	R-40	R-0	R-40	R-0	R-20
Essay and written response	R-20	R-20	R-60	R-0	R-0
Multiple Choice	R-40	R-20	R-0	R-40	R-0
Portfolio Based Assessment	R-20	R-0	R-0	R-40	R-40
Practicing format of state test	R-20	R-20	R-20	R-20	R-20
Presentation	R-20	R-20	R-40	R-0	R-20

Project Based	R-0	R-20	R-40	R-40	R-0
Demonstration	W-56	W-0	W-22	W-11	W-11
Document Based Questions	W-0	W-11	W-22	W-33	W-33
Essay and written response	W-33	W-11	W-33	W-22	W-0
Multiple Choice	W-11	W-22	W-55	W-0	W-11
Portfolio Based Assessment	W-0	W-11	W-0	W-56	W-33
Practicing format of state test	W-11	W-44	W-11	W-22	W-11
Presentation	W-22	W-33	W-11	W-22	W-11
Project Based	W-0	W-2	W-0	W-5	W-2

Demonstration	G-17	G-33	G-17	G-17	G-17
Document Based Questions	G-17	G-50	G-17	G-17	G-0
Essay and written response	G-0	G-83	G-0	G-17	G-0
Multiple Choice	G-17	G-50	G-33	G-0	G-0
Portfolio Based Assessment	G-0	G-33	G-0	G-50	G-17
Practicing format of state test	G-0	G-33	G-50	G-0	G-17
Presentation	G-17	G-17	G-33	G-33	G-0
Project Based	G-0	G-33	G-50	G-17	G-0

10. Please rate your use of each communication strategy with parents/families:

	Printed, school- wide report	Written, regular progress	Student-led conferences .	Phone calls home (not for disciplinary	Parent- teacher conference	Printed, school-wide progress	Web -based system with home	Written, occasional progress	Parent-team conferences
Almost Al.	B-81% R-100 W-78 G-86	B-27 R-20 W-44 G-33	B-0 R-0 W-11 G-0	B-0 R-0 W-22 G-0	B-27 R-20 w-22 G-14	B-33 R-60 W-44 G-57	B-88 R-80 W-44 G-71	B-0 R-40 W-13 G-0	B-13 R-20 W-13 G-0
More than	B-13	B-7	B-7	B-7	B-20	B-20	B-13	B-7	B-7
half the time	R-0	R-20	R-0	R-20	R-0	R-20	R-0	R-20	R-0
	W-0	W-11	W-0	W-22	W-11	W-33	W-22	W-13	W-25
	G-0	G-33	G-17	G-29	G-29	G-29	G-14	G-29	G-29
Approx	B-0	B-7	B-0	B-7	B-0	B-0	B-0	B-20	B-27
half the time	R-0	R-60	R-20	R-0	R-20	R-0	R-0	R-20	R-20
	W-0	W-0	W-11	W-11	W-22	W-11	W-11	W-25	W-13
	G-14	G-0	G-0	G-29	G-29	G-14	G-0	G-29	G-43
Less than	B-0	B-20	B-0	B-60	B-33	B-13	B-0	B-40	B-20
half the time	R-0	R-0	R-80	R-80	R-60	R-0	R-20	R-20	R-20
	W-11	W-33	W-33	W-33	W-44	W-11	W-11	W-25	W-50
	G-0	G-33	G-33	G-29	G-29	G-0	G-0	G-43	G-29
Never/Almost	B-6	B-33	B-93	B-27	B-20	B-33	B-0	B-27	B-33
Never happens	R-0	R-0	R-0	R-0	R-0	R-20	R-0	R-0	R-40
	W-11	W-11	W-44	W-11	W-0	W-0	W-0	W-25	W-0

G-0 G-0 G-50 G-14 G-0 G-0 G-14 G-0 G-0

11. How does your school rate in the following areas? Chart is reversed conclusive evidence on left.

No evidence; no indication of any implementatio n efforts	Trace evidence; a few indications of pre- implementatio n efforts	Minimal evidence; limited indications of initial implementatio n efforts	Some evidence; several indications of recently begun, broad- based, systemic implementatio n efforts	Considerable evidence; multiple indications of long-term, broad-based, systemic implementatio n efforts	Extensive evidence; numerous, compelling indications of significantly broad and deep implementatio n	Conclusive evidence; widespread, indisputable indications of full and complete implementatio n
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Connecting each	B-0	B-0	B-7	B-13	B-33	B-33	B-13
Young adolescent	R-0	R-0	R-20	R-40	R-20	R-0	R-20
In positive ways	W-0	W-0	W-11	W-22	W-44	W-22	W-0
With the school	G-0	G-0	G-0	G-33	G-50	G-17	G-0
And with caring adults							
Be structured to	B-0	B-0	B-13	B-7	B-33	B-27	B-20
create close,	R-0	R-0	R-20	R-40	R-20	R-0	R-20
sustained, relationships	W-11	W-0	W-0	W-33	W-33	W-11	W-0
betw. stdts. & tchrs.	G-0	G-0	G-0	G-50	G-33	G-17	G-0
Have tchr. Teams share	B-13	B-13	B-0	B-33	B-7	B-27	B-7
Responsibty for th educ.	R-0	R-0	R-0	R-80	R-0	R-0	R-20
pers. developmnt.	W-11	W-11	W-0	W-0	W-33	W-11	W-33

Of a common grp. Stdts	G-0	G-0	G-33	G-33	G-33	G-0
Create, promote & sustn.	B-0	B-20	B-7	B-13	B-20	B-33
A culture of mutual	R-0	R-20	R-20	R-40	R-20	R-20
Support & Collective	W-11	W-11	W-0	W-33	W-22	W-22
Responsibility for the	G-0	G-0	G-50	G-33	G-17	G-0
Educational and personal						
Development of each						
And every young man/woman						
Counseling & Guidance	B-0	B-0	B-7	B-20	B-27	B-47
Services to assist stdts.	R-0	R-0	R-0	R-40	R-40	R-20
In making life,	W-11	W-11	W-0	W-0	W-66	W-11
Career and educational	G-0	G-0	G-33	G-33	G-17	G-17
choices						
Collaborate & Cooperate	B-13	B-7	B-7	B-20	B-13	B-33
In planning and providing	R-0	R-0	R-0	R-20	R-20	R-60
Prof. training & staff dev.	W-11	W-0	W-11	W-55	W-33	W-0
Opportunities	G-0	G-17	G-17	G-33	G-33	G-0

Emphasizes not only B-7	B-7	B-27	B-7	B-13	B-20	B-20
Intell. Dev. But also R-0	R-0	R-0	20	R-40	R-20	R-20
Pers.&social dev. W-20	W-20	W-0	W-0	W-44	W-22	W-20
G-0	G-0	G-33	G-0	G-33	G-33	G-0

12. Which statement best describes the use of the NYS Learning Standards by the predominance of teachers in your school?

Answer Options	Response Percent
All planning begins with the standards, with assessments and activities following directly from the standards.	29.4%
Teachers make adjustments to their lesson in order to align them to the standards.	41.2%
Teachers continue to use pre-existing lessons and units and reference the standards (identifying which standards are hit).	17.6%
The standards prompted little changes in lesson and unit planning.	11.8%
The standards had no impact on our school.	5.9%

Walnut Hill

Answer Options	Response Percent
All planning begins with the standards, with assessments and activities following directly from the standards.	20.0%
Teachers make adjustments to their lesson in order to align them to the standards.	60.0%
Teachers continue to use pre-existing lessons and units and reference the standards (identifying which standards are hit).	20.0%
The standards prompted little changes in lesson and unit planning.	0.0%
The standards had no impact on our school.	0.0%

Oak Hill

Answer Options	Response Percent
All planning begins with the standards, with assessments and activities following directly from the standards.	50.0%
Teachers make adjustments to their lesson in order to align them to the standards.	50.0%
Teachers continue to use pre-existing lessons and units and reference the standards (identifying which standards are hit).	0.0%
The standards prompted little changes in lesson and unit planning.	0.0%
The standards had no impact on our school.	0.0%

Maple Hill

Answer Options	Response Percent
All planning begins with the standards, with assessments and activities following directly from the standards.	33.3%
Teachers make adjustments to their lesson in order to align them to the standards.	66.7%
Teachers continue to use pre-existing lessons and units and reference the standards (identifying which standards are hit).	0.0%
The standards prompted little changes in lesson and unit planning.	0.0%
The standards had no impact on our school.	0.0%

Pine Hill

13. Please rate the extent of student participation in the following programs in your school:

Almost all students participate	More than half of all students participate	Approximately half of the students participate	Less than half of the students participate	Few students participate	The program is not offered at our school
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Extra curric. Sports	B-27	B-53	B-20	B-0	B-0	B-0
For 7 th and 8 th	R-0	R-0	R-80	R-20	R-0	R-0
	W-0	W-13	W-63	W-25	W-0	W-0
Clubs	B-13	B-67	B-13	B-7	B-0	B-0
	R-0	R-0	R-20	R-40	R-40	R-0
	W-0	W-0	W-13	W-37	W-50	W-0
After sch. help	B-0	B-7	B-13	B-13	B-53	B-13
with teachers	R-0	R-0	R-20	R-60	R-20	R-0
	W-0	W-0	W-13	W-37	W-50	W-0
Formal Sch. Spons.	B-6	B-6	B-6	B-6	B-6	B-69
After Sch. Programs	R-0	R-20	R-0	R-60	R-20	R-0
that support students	W-0	W-0	W-13	W-37	W-37	W-
AIS After School Program	B-0	B-0	B-0	B-0	B-0	B-100
	R-0	R-0	R-20	R-20	R-40	R-20
	W-0	W-0	W-0	W-0	W-0	W-0
Coordinated service	B-0	B-7	B-14	B-0	B-0	B-79
learning opportunitie	R-0	R-0	R-20	R-0	R-20	R-60

Walnut

Does your school have interdisciplinary teams?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes.	12.5%	2
No (skip the remaining questions in this section).	93.8%	15

Oak

Does your school have interdisciplinary teams?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes.	40.0%	2
No (skip the remaining questions in this section).	60.0%	3

Pine

Does your school have interdisciplinary teams?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes.	77.8%	7
No (skip the remaining questions in this section).	33.3%	3

Maple

Does your school have interdisciplinary teams?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes.	85.7%	6
No (skip the remaining questions in this section).	14.3%	1

15. Walnut

In a typical week, how often do your interdisciplinary teams meet?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Five Times	0.0%	0
Four Times	0.0%	0
Three Times	0.0%	0
Two Times	0.0%	0
One Time	100.0%	1
Teams do not meet	0.0%	0
<i>answered question</i>		1
<i>skipped question</i>		18

Oak

In a typical week, how often do your interdisciplinary teams meet?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Five Times	0.0%	0
Four Times	0.0%	0
Three Times	0.0%	0
Two Times	0.0%	0
One Time	100.0%	2
Teams do not meet	0.0%	0
<i>answered question</i>		2
<i>skipped question</i>		3

Pine

In a typical week, how often do your interdisciplinary teams meet?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Five Times	0.0%	0
Four Times	0.0%	0
Three Times	42.9%	3
Two Times	57.1%	4
One Time	0.0%	0
Teams do not meet	0.0%	0
<i>answered question</i>		7

*skipped question***2**

Maple

In a typical week, how often do your interdisciplinary teams meet?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Five Times	33.3%	2
Four Times	33.3%	2
Three Times	33.3%	2
Two Times	0.0%	0
One Time	0.0%	0
Teams do not meet	0.0%	0
<i>answered question</i>		6
<i>skipped question</i>		1

16.

No evidence; no indication of any implementation efforts	Trace evidence; a few indications of pre- implementation efforts	Minimal evidence; limited indications of initial implementation efforts	Some evidence; several indications of recently begun, broad- based, systemic implementation efforts	Considerable evidence; multiple indications of long-term, broad-based, systemic implementation efforts	Extensive evidence; numerous, compelling indications of significantly broad and pervasive implementation	Conclusive evidence; widespread, indisputable indications of full and complete implementation
B-0	B-7	B-0	B-13	B-27	B-33	B-20
R-0	R-0	R-20	R-20	R-20	R-0	R-40
W-0	W-0	W-13	W-25	W-50	W-25	W-0
G-0	G-0	G-17	G-17	G-25	G-25	G-0

Adults and

Older youth

Serve as pos. role models (data is above)

Pos. Behaviors recognized

And affirmed	B-0	B-0	B-7	B-13	B-13	B-40	B-27
	R-0	R-0	R-0	R-0	R-20	R-40	R-40
	W-0	W-0	W-0	W-0	W-37	W-50	W-13
	G-0	G-0	G-0	G-25	G-25	G-25	G-0

Respect and

Caring engender

A feeling of self worth

B-0	B-0	B-7	B-20	B-27	B-27	B-20
R-0	R-0	R-0	R-20	R-0	R-60	R-20
W-0	W-0	W-0	W-13	W-37	W-37	W-13
G-0	G-0	G-17	G-33	G-17	G-33	G-0

Staff and students have opoport. to discuss and understand early adolescence

B-0	B-27	B-20	B-13	B-13	B-20	B-7
R-0	R-0	R-20	R-40	R-0	R-20	R-20
W-0	W-0	W-25	W-37	W-13	W-13	W-0
G-0	G-33	G-0	G-17	G-17	G-33	G-0

Counseling and Guidance Services assist stdts. when making life, career and educational choices

B-0	B-0	B-0	B-13	B-20	B-27	B-40
R-0	R-0	R-20	R-0	R-0	R-40	R-40
W-0	W-0	W-13	W-13	W-13	W-25	W-37
G-0	G-0	G17	G-17	G-33	G-0	G-33

A network of trained professionals, community

B-7	B-13	B-0	B-20	B-20	B-27	B-13
R-0	R-0	R-20	R-0	R-0	R-40	R-40
W-0	W-0	W-13	W-13	W-37	W-13	W-25
G-0	G-17	G-33	G-0	G-17	G-0	G-33

An adult mentor is available to students

B-13	B-7	B-27	B-7	B-20	B-13	B-7
R-0	R-40	R-0	R-20	R-0	R-20	R-20
W-0	W-0	W-13	W-13	W-13	W-37	W-25
G-0	G-17	G-50	G-17	G-0	G-17	G-0

No evidence; no indication of any implementation efforts	Trace evidence; a few indications of pre- implementation efforts	Minimal evidence; limited indications of initial implementation efforts	Some evidence; several indications of recently begun, broad- based, systemic implementation efforts	Considerable evidence; multiple indications of long-term, broad-based, systemic implementation efforts	Extensive evidence; numerous, compelling indications of significantly broad and deep implementation	Conclusive evidence; widespread, indisputable indications of full and complete implementation
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Princ. & staff know the needs and characteristics of middle level students & inst strategies that work for them

B-0	B-0	B-7	B-20	B-27	B-40	B-7
R-0	R-0	R-20	R-0	R-40	R-20	R-20
W-0	W-0	W-13	W-13	W-25	W-37	W-13
G-0	G-0	G-0	G-30	G-17	G-17	G-17

Staff have high expectations for all students	B-0 R-0 W-0 G-0	B-0 R-0 W-0 G-0	B-0 R-0 W-0 G-0	B-0 R-0 W-25 G-33	B-20 R-40 W-0 G-33	B-33 R-20 W-63 G-33	B-47 R-40 W-13 G-0
Teachers have the Opportunity To learn about and understand their content, subject Matter Course curric. and instructional strategies	B-7 R-0 W-0 G-0	B-0 R-0 W-0 G-0	B-7 R-0 W-0 G-17	B-27 R-20 W-17 G-17	B-13 R-20 W-23 G-G-25	B-20 R-40 W-50 G-25	B-27 R-20 W-25 G-0
Teachers participate In prof. training and staff dev. opportunities	B-0 R-0 W-0 G-0	B-13 R-0 W-0 G-0	B-0 R-0 W-0 G-0	B-6 R-0 W-13 G-33	B-19 R-40 W-13 G-33	B-31 R-20 W-50 G-17	B-31 R-40 W-25 G-17
School has taken a proactive approach to provide training in Common Core	B-25 R-0 W-0 G-0	B-13 R-0 W-0 G-0	B-0 R-0 W-0 G-17	B-6 R-0 W-0 G-33	B-13 R-20 W-37 G-0	B-19 R-20 W-37 G-50	B-25 R-60 W-25 G-0

Average				
Rating				
Qst. 17Elt 7		2	2	2.06
Rating		2	2	1.94
Qst. 16Elt 6				
Rating		3	1	
Qst. 15Elt 3				
Rating		3	3	2.25
Qst. 14*Elt 3				
Rating		1	1	1
Qst. 13*Elt 3				
Rating		3	2	2.5
Qst. 12*Elt 4				
Rating		2	2	2.25
Qst. 11*Elt 6				
Rating		2	2	1.75
Qst. 10*Elt 6				
Rating		2	2	2
Qst. 9*Elt 4				
Rating		2	2	2
Qst. 8*Elt 4				
Rating		2	3	2.75
Qst. 7*Elt 6				
Rating		2	2	2
Qst. 6*Elt 3				
Rating		1	3	2
Qst. 5*Elt 2				
Rating		2	3	2.75
Qst. 4*Elt 6				
Rating		1	2	1.5
Qst. 3*Elt 2				
Rating		3	3	3
Qst. 2*Elt 1				
School				
Pine Hill				
Walnut Hill				
Oak Hill				
Maple Hill				

Average

3

1.5

2.75

2

2

2.75

2

2

1.75

2.25

2.5

1

2.25

1.75

2.5

2.5

Key: 1-Low Degree of Implementation of the Elements, 2- Average Degree of Implementation of the Elements

3- High Degree of Implementation of the Elements

Walnut Hill is an Average Need District. They implement the Essential Elements to an Average Degree in comparison to the other schools in this study.

District Profile 2009-10

District Profile 2010-11 District Profile 2011-12

Walnut Hill is an Average Need District. They implement the Essential Elements to an Average Degree in comparison to the other schools in this study.

District Profile 2009-10

District Profile 2010-11

District Profile 2011-12

Name:	Walnut Hill	
K-12 Population/Gr. 8		620/50
Gr. 8 Avg. Class Size ELA		18
Gr. 8 Avg. Class Size Math		13
%Free Lunch Students		19%
%Reduced Lunch Students		11%
Total Free & Reduced		30%
Attendance Rate		96%
Suspension Rate		1%
Gen Ed Students	46	
Special Ed Students-	6	
ELA Grade 8 %3's and 4's		75%
ELA Grade 8 % 4's		21%
ELA Mean Score	##	
Math Grade 8 %3's and 4's		40%
Math Grade 8 % 4's		6%
Math Mean Score	##	

2 year avg. 668

2 year avg math 676

Name:	Walnut Hill	
K-12 Population/Gr. 8		620/50
Gr. 8 Avg. Class Size ELA		17
Gr. 8 Avg. Class Size Math		13
%Free Lunch Students		23%
%Reduced Lunch Students		7%
Total Free & Reduced		30%
Attendance Rate		96%
Suspension Rate		1%
Gen Ed Students-43	46	
Special Ed Students-5	6	
ELA Grade 8 %3's and 4's		77%
ELA Grade 8 % 4's		4%
ELA Mean Score	667	
Math Grade 8 %3's and 4's		63%
Math Grade 8 % 4's		10%
Math Mean Score	680	

Name:	Walnut Hill	
K-12 Population/Gr. 8		625/50
Gr. 8 Avg. Class Size ELA		17
Gr. 8 Avg. Class Size Math		13
%Free Lunch Students		21%
%Reduced Lunch Students		10%
Total Free & Reduced		31%
Attendance Rate		96%
Suspension Rate		1%
Gen Ed Students-43	46	
Special Ed Students-5	6	
ELA Grade 8 %3's and 4's		73%
ELA Grade 8 % 4's		0%
ELA Mean Score	668	
Math Grade 8 %3's and 4's		47%
Math Grade 8 % 4's		8%
Math Mean Score	673	
ELA 8 NYS Avg. % 3&4		50%
Math 8 NYS Avg. % 3&4		61%

Oak Hill is a High Needs Resource Rural District. They implement the Essential Elements to an Above Average Degree in comparison to the other schools in this study.

District Profile 2009-10

Name:	Oak Hill	
K-12 Population/Gr. 8		420/30
Gr. 8 Avg. Class Size ELA		16
Gr. 8 Avg. Class Size Math		15
%Free Lunch Students		42%
%Reduced Lunch Students		16%
Total Free & Reduced		58%
Attendance Rate		95%
Suspension Rate		8%
Gen Ed Students	25	
Special Ed Students-	3	
ELA Grade 8 %3's and 4's		50%
ELA Grade 8 % 4's		3%
ELA Mean Score	655	
Math Grade 8 %3's and 4's		38%
Math Grade 8 % 4's		6%
Math Mean Score	668	

District Profile 2010-11

Name:	Oak Hill	
K-12 Population/Gr. 8		400/25
Gr. 8 Avg. Class Size ELA		14
Gr. 8 Avg. Class Size Math		13
%Free Lunch Students		48%
%Reduced Lunch Students		13%
Total Free & Reduced		61%
Attendance Rate		91%
Suspension Rate		8%
Gen Ed Students-43	19	
Special Ed Students-5	5	
ELA Grade 8 %3's and 4's		33%
ELA Grade 8 % 4's		0%
ELA Mean Score	651	
Math Grade 8 %3's and 4's		38%
Math Grade 8 % 4's		0%
Math Mean Score	664	

District Profile 2011-12

Name:	Oak Hill	
K-12 Population/Gr. 8		350/30
Gr. 8 Avg. Class Size ELA		15
Gr. 8 Avg. Class Size Math		16
%Free Lunch Students		51%
%Reduced Lunch Students		14%
Total Free & Reduced		65%
Attendance Rate		95%
Suspension Rate		3%
Gen Ed Students	25	
Special Ed Students-	3	
ELA Grade 8 %3's and 4's		64%
ELA Grade 8 % 4's		0%
ELA Mean Score	652	
Math Grade 8 %3's and 4's		54%
Math Grade 8 % 4's		4%
Math Mean Score	670	

Maple Hill is a High Needs Resource Rural School. They implement the Essential Elements to an Above Average Degree in comparison to the other schools in this study.

District Profile 2009-10

Name:	Maple Hill	
K-12 Population/Gr. 8		910/80
Gr. 8 Avg. Class Size ELA		Not listed
Gr. 8 Avg. Class Size Math		15
%Free Lunch Students		32%
%Reduced Lunch Students		9%
Total Free & Reduced		41%
Attendance Rate		94%
Suspension Rate		3%
Gen Ed Students	71	
Special Ed Students-	5	
ELA Grade 8 %3's and 4's		67%
ELA Grade 8 % 4's		14%
ELA Mean Score		67200%
Math Grade 8 %3's and 4's		16%
Math Grade 8 % 4's		64%
Math Mean Score		68400%

District Profile 2010-11

Name:	Maple Hill	
K-12 Population/Gr. 8		910/70
Gr. 8 Avg. Class Size ELA		18
Gr. 8 Avg. Class Size Math		14
%Free Lunch Students		40%
%Reduced Lunch Students		11%
Total Free & Reduced		51%
Attendance Rate		94%
Suspension Rate		3%
Gen Ed Students	59	
Special Ed Students	8	
ELA Grade 8 %3's and 4's		64%
ELA Grade 8 % 4's		4%
ELA Mean Score	665	
Math Grade 8 %3's and 4's		84%
Math Grade 8 % 4's		13%
Math Mean Score	687	

District Profile 2011-12

Name:	Maple Hill	
K-12 Population/Gr. 8		890/55
Gr. 8 Avg. Class Size ELA		Not Listed
Gr. 8 Avg. Class Size Math		18
%Free Lunch Students		44%
%Reduced Lunch Students		10%
Total Free & Reduced		54%
Attendance Rate		96%
Suspension Rate		3%
Gen Ed Students	75	
Special Ed Students	13	
ELA Grade 8 %3's and 4's		51%
ELA Grade 8 % 4's		0%
ELA Mean Score	656	
Math Grade 8 %3's and 4's		67%
Math Grade 8 % 4's		8%
Math Mean Score	678	

Pine Hill is an Average Needs District. They implement the Essential Elements to a below average degree in comparison to the other schools in this study.

District Profile 2009-10

Name:	Pine Hill	
K-12 Population/Gr. 8	965/86	
Gr. 8 Avg. Class Size ELA	19	
Gr. 8 Avg. Class Size Math	20	
%Free Lunch Students	36%	
%Reduced Lunch Students	16%	
Total Free & Reduced	52%	
Attendance Rate	94%	
Suspension Rate	4%	
Gen Ed Students	64	
Special Ed Students-	18	
ELA Grade 8 %3's and 4's	46%	
ELA Grade 8 % 4's	5%	
ELA Mean Score	657	
Math Grade 8 %3's and 4's	40%	
Math Grade 8 % 4's	6%	
Math Mean Score	670	

District Profile 2010-11

Name:	Pine Hill	
K-12 Population/Gr. 8	1000/72	
Gr. 8 Avg. Class Size ELA	16	
Gr. 8 Avg. Class Size Math	17	
%Free Lunch Students	30%	
%Reduced Lunch Students	9%	
Total Free & Reduced	39%	
Attendance Rate	94%	
Suspension Rate	4%	
Gen Ed Students	52	
Special Ed Students	16	
ELA Grade 8 %3's and 4's	47%	
ELA Grade 8 % 4's	1%	
ELA Mean Score	652	
Math Grade 8 %3's and 4's	40%	
Math Grade 8 % 4's	6%	
Math Mean Score	663	

District Profile 2011-12

Name:	Pine Hill	
K-12 Population/Gr. 8	950/80	
Gr. 8 Avg. Class Size ELA	19	
Gr. 8 Avg. Class Size Math	17	
%Free Lunch Students	30%	
%Reduced Lunch Students	12%	
Total Free & Reduced	42%	
Attendance Rate	94%	
Suspension Rate	18%	
Gen Ed Students	64	
Special Ed Students	20	
ELA Grade 8 %3's and 4's	38%	
ELA Grade 8 % 4's	0%	
ELA Mean Score	650	
Math Grade 8 %3's and 4's	41%	
Math Grade 8 % 4's	4%	
Math Mean Score	667	

**Rubrics for the
Essential Elements of Standards-Focused Middle-Level Schools and Programs**
(Summer 2004)

developed by:

The New York State Education Department's Middle-Level Education Program
in collaboration with

The New York State Middle School Association & The Statewide Network of Middle-Level Education Liaisons

The *Essential Elements of Standards Focused Middle Schools and Programs* describe the expectations for middle level programs in New York State. There are seven elements; the entire *Essential Elements* document is available as a Microsoft Word document at nysmsa.org:

- A philosophy and mission that reflect the intellectual and developmental needs and characteristics of young adolescents (youth 10-14 years of age).
- An educational program that is comprehensive, challenging, purposeful, integrated, relevant, and standards-based.
- An organization and structure that support both academic excellence and personal development.
- Classroom instruction appropriate to the needs and characteristics of young adolescents provided by skilled and knowledgeable teachers.
- Strong educational leadership and a building administration that encourage, facilitate, and sustain involvement, participation, and partnerships.
- A network of academic and personal support available for all students.
- Professional learning and staff development for all staff that are ongoing, planned, purposeful, and collaboratively developed.

The *Essential Elements* were developed as a coherent set of guidelines for middle schools. The *Essential Elements* are more than guidelines, however. They are research-based and increased student achievement has been connected to greater implementation of the *Essential Elements*. These rubrics are intended as a resource to schools that want to assess their implementation of the *Essential Elements*. Behavior manifestations are being collected for each component of the rubric; future iterations of the rubrics will include these behavior manifestations.

1. A philosophy and mission that reflect the intellectual and developmental needs and characteristics of young adolescents.				
Criteria	1	2	3	4
1.a The degree to which the shared beliefs of the school and staff reflect developing the whole child, intellectually, academically, personally, socially, physically, emotionally and ethically.	School and staff operate with an apparent lack of regard for the development of the whole child.	School and staff operate inconsistently regarding the development of the whole child. Certain aspects of child development are emphasized more than others.	School and staff act on their shared beliefs of the development of the whole child by highlighting adolescents' intellectual, academic, social, physical, emotional and ethical development.	School and staff actively promote and advocate the development of the whole child within and outside the school. The larger school community shares and supports these beliefs.
1.b The degree to which the school and staff work together to ensure that all students achieve at high levels and develop as individuals.	There are no collaborative efforts to ensure that all students achieve at high levels and/or develop as individuals.	School and staff work with each other on occasion to help selected students achieve at high levels and/or develop as individuals.	School and staff regularly work together to promote students' achievement and individual development. These efforts favor some students more than others.	School and staff purposefully promote all students' achievement and success and individual development.
1.c The degree to which the school and staff accept - individually and collectively - responsibility for the educational and personal development of each and every student.	School and staff- individually and collectively - do not assume responsibility for the educational and personal development of each and every student.	School and staff- individually and collectively - accept responsibility for enacting policies and programs, but not for their effectiveness in promoting students' success.	School and staff- individually and collectively - understand the direct link between their programs and practices and students' learning. These efforts favor some students more than others.	School and staff implement programs, policies and practices based on their success in promoting each student's learning. Individually and collectively, they accept responsibility for the educational and personal development of each and every student.

1. A philosophy and mission that reflect the intellectual and developmental needs and characteristics of young adolescents (con't).				
Criteria	1	2	3	4
1.d The degree to which the school ensures each student a safe, inviting, trusting and mutually respectful learning environment that offers both physical and psychological safety.	The school environment is unsafe and threatening for staff and students..	The school environment focuses primarily on discipline and student management issues.	The school environment primarily focuses on learning with occasional disruptions by behavior management issues.	The environment of the school is safe, inviting and trusting promoting the focus to be on learning. Staff and students are mutually respectful. - Misbehaviors are primarily minor and minimally disruptive.
1.e The degree to which the school community models caring and respectful interactions with students and with other adults.	The school community does not encourage caring and respectful interactions.	The school community encourages students to be respectful and caring of each other and of other adults.	The school community creates a respectful, caring sense of community in the students and other adults with whom they interact.	The school community operates in a culture where respect and caring for one another are pervasive.
1.f The degree to which the school and staff accept responsibility for providing a successful transition from the elementary grades to the middle grades to the high school grades and from childhood to adolescence.	Organized efforts to assist young adolescents in making these transitions are nonexistent.	Organized efforts by the school and staff to assist young adolescents in making these transitions are sporadic and generally initiated by a few staff members, an individual team, or a single department.	Organized efforts by the school and staff to assist young adolescents in making these transitions, while thoughtfully planned and implemented by the whole school, reflect an unequal emphasis on either the grade-to-grade transitions or the transition from childhood to adolescence.	Organized efforts by the school and staff to assist young adolescents in making these transitions are purposefully planned and implemented by the whole school and provide balanced attention to both the grade to grade transitions and the transition from childhood to adolescence.

2. An educational program that is comprehensive, challenging, purposeful, relevant, integrated, and standards-based.				
Criteria	1	2	3	4
2a. The degree to which the middle-level educational program emphasizes the intellectual, social, personal, physical, and ethical development of young adolescents	<p>i. The school program does not meet the intellectual, social, personal, physical, or ethical needs of the students.</p> <p>ii. Teachers' lessons do not meet the intellectual or the social/personal/physical/ ethical needs of students.</p>	<p>i. The school program emphasizes only one the needs: intellectual, social, personal, physical or ethical.</p> <p>ii. Teachers' lessons emphasize only one of the needs: intellectual or the social/personal/physical/ ethical needs of the students.</p>	<p>i. The school program addresses both intellectual and social/ personal/ physical/ethical needs of the students. One of these two areas is consistently emphasized over the other.</p> <p>ii. Most teachers' lessons address intellectual and social, personal, physical, and ethical needs of students.</p>	<p>i. A balanced comprehensive program that is intentionally designed to meet each student's intellectual and social/ personal/ physical/ ethical needs in the context of supporting his or her academic success.</p> <p>ii. Teachers regularly and intentionally design lessons that take into account each student's intellectual, social, personal, physical and ethical needs.</p>
2.b The degree to which the middle-level educational program is challenging, rigorous, and meaningful and reflective of the 28 Learning Standards	<p>i. Teachers design or plan lessons that lack rigor, engagement and meaningfulness and do not reflect the Standards.</p> <p>ii. Students perceive much of their learning in school as irrelevant, boring and meaningless.</p>	<p>i. Teachers design or plan lessons that are either rigorous and meaningful or are connected to the Learning Standards, but not both.</p> <p>ii. Students perceive their learning in school to be too difficult, too easy, insufficiently connected to their lives or unchallenging to their intellect.</p>	<p>i. Teachers design or plan lessons for their classes that are rigorous and meaningful and address their own content Learning Standards.</p> <p>ii. Most students perceive their learning to be relevant and meaningful to their lives and challenging to their intellect.</p>	<p>i. Teachers design or plan differentiated lessons to provide challenging, rigorous, and meaningful learning for all students and integrate all Learning Standards.</p> <p>ii. All students perceive their learning as both relevant and meaningful to their lives and challenging to their intellect.</p>

2. An educational program that is comprehensive, challenging, purposeful, relevant, integrated, and standards-based (con't).				
Criteria	1	2	3	4
2.c The degree to which the middle-level educational program includes common learning skills to increase student achievement across all grades and subjects (e.g. how to plan, study, conduct research and read for understanding)	<p>i. Teachers' practices are isolated and individualistic. No set of common learning skills has been adopted.</p> <p>ii. Teachers do not instruct students in the use of common learning skills.</p> <p>iii. Students' work reflects teachers' isolated and individualistic behaviors.</p>	<p>i. Teams or other sets of teachers have adopted a set of common learning skills intended to increase students learning.</p> <p>ii. Teachers occasionally instruct students in the use of these common learning skills or emphasize them inconsistently in their assignments.</p> <p>iii. Students' work occasionally reflects the use of these common learning skills.</p>	<p>i. The faculty as a whole has adopted a set of common learning skills intended to increase students' learning.</p> <p>ii. Teachers instruct students in the use of common learning skills across assignments.</p> <p>iii. Students' work reflects their common learning skills.</p>	<p>i. The faculty as a whole routinely examines and refines the common learning skills in light of students' learning.</p> <p>ii. Teachers consistently instruct students in the use of common learning skills and reinforce their application.</p> <p>iii. Students independently apply these common learning skills on a consistent basis.</p>

2. An educational program that is comprehensive, challenging, purposeful, relevant, integrated, and standards-based (con't).				
Criteria	1	2	3	4
2.d The degree to which the middle-level educational program has common performance expectations across all grades and subject area (e.g. using complete sentences; using standard English in school; following directions without multiple prompts, note-taking, graphic organizers, reading for understanding, writing in the content areas, using agendas, etc.)	<p>i. A set of common performance expectations has not been identified nor agreed upon by teachers.</p> <p>ii. Teachers instruct their students to meet what appears to be a wide range of performance expectations, some of which seem arbitrary.</p> <p>iii. Students depend exclusively on their teachers to identify the strengths and weaknesses of their own work.</p>	<p>i. Teams or other groups of teachers have adopted a limited set of common performance expectations for students.</p> <p>ii. Teachers emphasize these common expectations occasionally or inconsistently in their assignments.</p> <p>iii. Students analyze their own work in a cursory manner and depend primarily on their teachers to identify their strengths and weaknesses.</p>	<p>i. The faculty as a whole has adopted a set of common performance expectations for students.</p> <p>ii. Teachers instruct students in the use of these common expectations across assignments.</p> <p>iii. Students analyze their own work, reflect on their progress, and identify their strengths and weaknesses in a very limited context (i.e. math, PE)</p>	<p>i. The faculty as a whole routinely examines and refines a set of common performance expectations for students with student input.</p> <p>ii. Teachers consistently instruct students in the use of these expectations and reinforce their application through assignments.</p> <p>iii. Students routinely and independently analyze their own work in various subjects against the criteria, reflect on their progress and identify their own strengths and weaknesses.</p>

2. An educational program that is**comprehensive, challenging, purposeful, relevant, integrated, and standards-based (con't).**

Criteria	1
<p>2.e The degree to which the middle-level educational program emphasizes reading, writing and mathematics (literacy and numeracy) across all subject areas</p> <p>i. Literacy and numeracy are considered to be the sole responsibility of the content specialists.</p> <p>ii. Content area teachers do not understand literacy as it relates to their content areas.</p> <p>iii. Reading and writing instruction occurs only in ELA/reading classes.</p>	<p>iv. Content area teachers do not understand numeracy as it relates to their content areas.</p> <p>v. Numeracy instruction occurs only in mathematics classes.</p> <p>i. Teachers across content areas minimize their responsibility for the development of literacy and numeracy skills in their students.</p> <p>ii. Content area teachers' understanding of literacy is limited to a narrow band of skills (e.g. mechanics).</p> <p>iii. Literacy instruction by content area teachers is limited to a narrow band of skills (e.g. sounding out words, writing in complete sentences).</p> <p>iv. Content area teachers have limited understanding of numeracy as it related to their content areas.</p> <p>v. Application of numeracy skills is isolated and individualistic in content areas other than math.</p> <p>i. Teachers across all content areas understand their responsibility for the development of literacy and numeracy skills in their students.</p> <p>ii. Content area teachers understand the nature of literacy in their content areas.</p> <p>iii. Content area teachers instruct students in literacy skills for their content area (e.g. strategies for reading science text; strategies for writing word problems in mathematics).</p> <p>iv. Content area teachers understand numeracy skills as they relate to their content areas (mathematical reasoning, problem solving, ordering, patterns, etc.).</p> <p>v. Content area teachers apply numeracy skills and connect them to their lessons (e.g. applying the numeracy skill of ordering to the creation of a <u>time line in social studies</u>).</p> <p>i. Teachers across all content areas share responsibility for the development of literacy and numeracy skills in their students.</p> <p>ii. Content area teachers understand the nature of literacy in their content areas, as defined by best practice.</p> <p>iii. Content area teachers explicitly instruct students in literacy skills for their content area and routinely embed these skills in their lessons.</p> <p>iv. Content area teachers understand numeracy skills and concepts to be an integral part of their content area.</p> <p>v. Content area teachers apply numeracy skills and concepts and explicitly connect them meaningful real world experiences.</p>

2. An educational program that is comprehensive, challenging, purposeful, relevant, integrated, and standards-based (con't).

Criteria	1	2	3	4
2.f The degree to which the middle-level educational program includes ongoing Standards-based assessments	<p>i. Program includes assessments that are not based on the State Learning Standards.</p> <p>ii. School/classroom assessments are based on teachers' own individual criteria or standards and are not based on the demands of the NYS assessments.</p> <p>iii. Teachers rely heavily on traditional summative testing.</p> <p>iv. Assessment data are not utilized to inform program or instructional decisions.</p>	<p>i. Program includes limited summative assessments in one or more disciplines that address the State Learning Standards.</p> <p>ii. Few school/classroom assessments are based on the demands of the NYS assessments.</p> <p>iii. Teachers rely on traditional testing for their summative measures but may include isolated performances, products and processes as well.</p> <p>iv. Teachers rely on one form of assessment data to make program and instructional decisions.</p>	<p>i. Program includes summative assessments in all core disciplines that address the State Learning Standards.</p> <p>ii. Some school/classroom assessments reflect selected NYS assessment demands, through the use of parallel forms of the test and test simulations.</p> <p>iii. Teachers use a variety of assessment measures, including processes, performances and products, although some emphasize testing more than other measures.</p> <p>iv. Teachers use diagnostic measures selectively to improve program and instruction.</p>	<p>i. The middle-level program includes assessments in all disciplines that address the State Learning Standards.</p> <p>ii. School/classroom assessments have been designed to reflect the demands and support students' attainment of the NYS assessments.</p> <p>iii. Teachers use a variety of diagnostic, formative and summative assessment measures that address varied students' learning styles and needs.</p> <p>iv. Standards-based assessment data are used routinely to make program and instructional decisions</p>

2. An educational program that is comprehensive, challenging, purposeful, relevant, integrated, and standards-based (con't).

Criteria	1	2	3	4
2.g The degree to which content areas are integrated and articulated vertically and horizontally within and across various curricular areas, Learning Standards and grade levels	Each discipline or content area is viewed completely independent from other disciplines and content areas and grade levels.	Occasionally, deliberate connections are made between disciplines, subject areas and grade levels.	Teachers regularly design and implement interdisciplinary assignments or they use approaches that allow students to see content connections across subject areas and grade levels.	Content areas and Learning Standards are consistently integrated vertically and horizontally so that knowledge and the acquisition of skills and knowledge are the natural focus of instruction or program rather than specific subjects or disciplines.

2. An educational program that is comprehensive, challenging, purposeful, relevant, integrated, and standards-based (con't).

Criteria	1	2	3	4
2.h The degree to which the middle-level educational program involves family, community, and the world outside the school in the development of young adolescents	<p>i. Parents and community are uninvolved in and uninformed about the middle-level program.</p> <p>ii. Parents and community feel alienated or threatened when contacted by school.</p> <p>iii. Parents and community feel detached from their young adolescents.</p> <p>iv. All student learning occurs within the school building.</p>	<p>i. Parents and community have little involvement in the school program, limited to one or more isolated events.</p> <p>ii. Parents and community feel disconnected from the school "community".</p> <p>iii. Parents and community have little investment in understanding and meeting the developmental needs of their young adolescents within their school.</p> <p>iv. Student formal learning outside the school building is limited to isolated assignments.</p>	<p>i. Parents and community are involved in the school program, but not necessarily in their students' learning.</p> <p>ii. Parents and community are welcomed into the school when they are willing to assume selected roles or functions.</p> <p>iii. Parents and community seek assistance in understanding and meeting the developmental needs of their young adolescents.</p> <p>iv. Student formal learning takes place outside the school building through selected assignments and joint endeavors with the community.</p>	<p>i. Parents and community are integrally involved in students' learning.</p> <p>ii. Parents and community are sought by the school as critical players and partners in the development of the whole child.</p> <p>iii. The school invests time and energy in involving parents and community members in formal and informal experiences that will help parents understand and meet the developmental needs of their young adolescents.</p> <p>iv. Student learning in school is consistently extended to the community.</p>

3. An organization and structure that supports both academic excellence and personal development.

Criteria	1	2	3	4
3.a The degree to which middle level grades are configured to promote the Essential Elements of a middle level program (grades 5-8)	There is no deliberate configuration to support a middle level program.	The middle level program is limited to two grade levels.	The middle level program includes three of the four middle level grades.	There is a 5-8 middle grade configuration designed to promote a middle level program.
3.b The degree to which the middle level program is structured to promote a sense of belonging to reduce the feeling of anonymity and isolation among students.	<p>a. There are no interdisciplinary teams.</p> <p>b. A sense of self-contained communities, i.e. houses, is missing.</p> <p>c. Staff actions do not promote a sense of community or belonging.</p>	<p>a. The school program recognizes that teams should exist, but efforts to create effective interdisciplinary teams are minimal or ineffective.</p> <p>b. A sense of team community is based on cosmetic effects in the building.</p> <p>c. Students and staff share instructional space with other teams but there is little or no investment in creating a sense of community or meeting individual student needs.</p>	<p>a. The school program is organized with effective interdisciplinary teams.</p> <p>b. The layout of the school suggests the presence of a team community.</p> <p>c. The school organization promotes team unity and a group identity for all students and staff.</p>	<p>a. The school program is organized with students and staff playing active roles in effective interdisciplinary teams.</p> <p>b. The sense of team community is established through strategic layout and arrangement in the building.</p> <p>c. The school organization promotes a sense of family and ensures that students are viewed as individuals and receive personal attention. There is synergy between practices and behaviors and a clear sense of identity.</p>

3. An organization and structure that supports both academic excellence and personal development (con't).

Criteria	1	2	3	4
3.c The degree to which the teams in the school are structured to create close, sustained relationships between students and teachers.	<p>i. The school is not organized in teams that promote the academic, social and emotional development of the group as a whole.</p> <p>ii. The focus of the school organization is solely on the delivery of instruction to the exclusion of creating close sustained relationships.</p>	<p>i. The school is organized in teams and houses that don't function as teams.</p> <p>ii. The focus of the school organization is to provide academic support with the creation of close sustained relationships left to individual teachers/staff.</p>	<p>i. The school is organized in teams that function collaboratively for academic purposes.</p> <p>ii. The focus of the school organization is to provide academic support. Personal/social needs of adolescents are addressed but not purposefully linked.</p>	<p>i. The school is organized in teams that promote the academic, social and emotional development of the group as a whole.</p> <p>ii. The focus of the program/school organization is to connect adult staff to individual students and their needs in an effort to provide academic support and address the personal/social/academic needs of adolescents.</p>
3.d The degree to which the school provides, for those students needing additional help to meet the State's standards, opportunities for additional time, instruction, and personal support (e.g., after school, before school, summer school, reduced class size, tutoring, pupil personnel services)	<p>i. The school provides limited formal opportunities for additional instruction for those students needing additional help in meeting the State's standards.</p> <p>ii. There is no written plan for delivering additional services nor are such services based on student achievement data.</p>	<p>i. Non-assigned student time is scheduled with instructional and non-instructional staff other than team teachers for students who need additional help.</p> <p>ii. There is a written plan for providing additional services, which are offered at the expense of other classes such as exploratories or specials. These services function separately from class work and may or may not be taught by qualified staff.</p>	<p>i. Non-assigned student time is scheduled for all students with appropriately certified instructional staff and may or may not be the team teachers.</p> <p>ii. There is a written plan for providing additional services which are offered by qualified staff and based on individual needs as reflected in selected content areas, i.e. math, ELA.</p>	<p>i. Non-assigned student time is scheduled for all students with qualified and effective teachers for the purpose of enrichment and/or academic support.</p> <p>ii. There is a coherent plan for delivering additional services based on student achievement and personal data. These additional services are data-driven and consistent with current class work, targeted to the individual needs of the students and offered without sacrificing current programs.</p>

3. An organization and structure that supports both academic excellence and personal development (con't).

Criteria	1	2	3	4
3.e The degree to which the school establishes ties with the school community that strengthens connections between school/education and career opportunities.	<p>i. The school organization does not recognize the school-to-work connection.</p> <p>ii. The school is separate from the business world and formal learning is assumed to exist only within school walls.</p>	<p>i. The school organization informally acknowledges the school-to-work connection by using isolated assignments and activities that expose students to the world of work outside school.</p> <p>ii. The school invites participation of outside community through sporadic guest speakers and/or once a year field trips without integrating activities into the curriculum.</p>	<p>i. The school organization encourages and develops school-to-work connections through career exploration done by individuals, teams or departments.</p> <p>ii. Students participate in limited career development opportunities and understand the varied post high school learning experiences that include business, vocational and higher education.</p> <p>iii. Family and community members share talents and skills to enhance curriculum and instruction with real world experiences in selected subjects and for very specific purposes.</p>	<p>i. The school organization promotes and encourages school-to-work connections and career exploration through an integrated curriculum approach that identifies, recognizes and creates experiences that connect their schoolwork with possible career choices.</p> <p>ii. Students have full access to career development opportunities in a variety of post high school learning locations through coordinated school experiences.</p> <p>iii. The school utilizes the talents and skills of family, community and business partners to promote an education that routinely extends beyond the school.</p>

3. An organization and structure that supports both academic excellence and personal development (con't).

Criteria	1	2	3	4
3.f The degree to which the school promotes and encourages appropriate participation of pupils with disabilities in all curricular, co-curricular and extra-curricular activities.	<p>i. Most students with disabilities have access to the curriculum. Selected students with disabilities have little or no access due to the way their disability is ignored by the program.</p> <p>ii. Students with disabilities are grouped homogeneously by teams and in an isolated fashion.</p> <p>iii. Teachers rarely differentiate instruction as a means of meeting the needs of their students.</p> <p>iv. Students with disabilities do not participate in any curricular, co-curricular and extra-curricular activities.</p>	<p>i. All students with disabilities have formal access to the curriculum.</p> <p>ii. Students with disabilities are grouped homogeneously by team, but teachers may, at times, group students by interest, style or using other criteria.</p> <p>iii. Teachers differentiate assessments as a means of meeting the needs of their students by providing students with choices on how to present their work.</p> <p>iv. Few students with disabilities participate in curricular, co-curricular and extra-curricular activities.</p>	<p>i. Students access to the curriculum is facilitated by the use of heterogeneous classes or by the reconfiguring of teams or teachers to classes.</p> <p>ii. Students, including students with disabilities, are grouped primarily heterogeneously by team.</p> <p>iii. Teachers use various instructional and assessment strategies designed to meet the needs of different students.</p> <p>iv. A majority of students with disabilities actively participate in curricular, co-and extra-curricular activities.but only with the encouragement of the special ed. staff.</p>	<p>i. Students' access with the curriculum is maximized by flexible grouping and varied teaching and co-teaching arrangements.</p> <p>ii. All students are grouped heterogeneously by team.</p> <p>iii. Teachers tap students' varied strengths and styles using a variety of instructional and assessment strategies to meet the needs of all of their students including those with disabilities.</p> <p>iv. The school staff promotes and encourages the participation of all students in curriculuar, co-and extra-curricular activities regardless of their circumstances.</p>

**4. Classroom instruction appropriate to the needs and characteristics of young adolescents
provided by skilled and knowledgeable teachers.**

Criteria	1	2	3	4
4.a The degree to which teachers' instructional techniques and process are purposeful and strategic	i. Course, unit, and lesson objectives and teachers' techniques and processes seem idiosyncratic and lack direction or purpose.	i. Course, unit, and lesson objectives are organized around in appropriate criteria. ii. Teachers' instructional techniques and processes reflect these criteria leading to minimal or superficial understanding.	i. Course, unit, and lesson objectives are purposefully organized around concepts, themes, issues and/or standards. ii. Teachers' instructional techniques and processes support students' learning of these objectives promoting basic understanding.	i. Objectives and goals are clearly and publicly derived from National Standards, NYS Learning Standards performance indicators, and local curricula. ii. Teachers' instruction is designed to promote depth of understanding rather than breadth; instruction is strategically implemented and designed to challenge and encourage.
4.b The degree to which teachers' instructional techniques and process reflect the developmental characteristics of young adolescents	Teachers fail to recognize the unique characteristics and concomitant needs of young adolescents.	The teachers recognize developmental differences of early adolescents but instructional techniques and processes fail to reflect these differences.	The teachers know and understand the needs and developmental characteristics of young adolescents and use this knowledge when planning students' learning experiences.	The teachers have a comprehensive understanding of the continuum of developmental characteristics within the range of early adolescence. They consistently and effectively apply this knowledge of, and experience with, developmental characteristics of students to their instruction of students in the middle grades.

4. Classroom instruction appropriate to the needs and characteristics of young adolescents provided by skilled and knowledgeable teachers (con't).				
Criteria	1	2	3	4
4.c The degree to which teachers' instructional practices reflect content knowledge and pedagogy	Teachers lack the content knowledge and the knowledge of instructional practices necessary to insure students can meet the Intermediate Standards.	Teachers have a minimal understanding of their content area. Teacher-directed instruction is more common than learner-centered practices.	Teachers have a solid understanding of their content area and emphasize a variety of student-centered approaches to their learning.	Teachers have a deep understanding of their subject matter and its connection to other content areas. Teachers rely on student-centered teaching and assessment practices and revisit these practices by examining them in light of students' learning.
4.d The degree to which teachers know and understand, the Learning Standards	Teachers are unfamiliar with their content standards and have not formally used them in their planning or teaching.	Teachers know and understand NYS Learning Standards although there is little evidence of their presence in teachers' assessment. They either teach or assess the Standards.	Teachers know and understand the Learning Standards in their area and use them as a lens for deciding what to teach. They teach and assess the Standards.	Teachers consistently teach, assess and integrate the Standards during classroom discussions and other learning and assessment opportunities.
4.e The degree to which teachers utilize technology and other instructional technology	Teachers do not apply technology to instruction. If there are technologies in a classroom, it is exclusively for teacher use.	Teachers occasionally include technology as a part of instruction, but primarily as a special event.	Teachers use current technology to support and enhance teaching and learning through its use in selected teaching and assessment activities that are presentational in nature.	Teachers' application of current technology within instruction is seamless, learner-centered, and used as a tool or means to an end, rather than as an end in itself; technology is applied within the context of regular instruction rather than as a special event.

4. Classroom instruction appropriate to the needs and characteristics of young adolescents killed and knowledgeable teachers (con't).				
Criteria	1	2	3	4
4.f The degree to which learning opportunities are rigorous and academically challenging	Instruction is focused almost exclusively on memorization of facts, terms, and algorithms.	Instruction is focused at the knowledge and comprehension levels, and students are rarely asked to apply or use what they learn.	Instruction is focused on thinking, reasoning, and problem solving as well as helping students acquire necessary content and skills.	Instruction demands that students search for in-depth understanding of what they are learning through systemic research and inquiry.
4.g The degree to which instructional groups are flexible	<p>i. Permanent homogeneous groups are used throughout the year.</p> <p>iv. Student grouping drives Master Schedule development</p>	<p>i. Students work in some homogeneous and some heterogeneous groups.</p> <p>ii. Group membership tends to remain the same throughout the year.</p> <p>iv. Students are primarily grouped by ability with some flexibility in changing group membership built into the Master Schedule.</p>	<p>i. Flexible grouping is used based upon student needs and interests.</p> <p>ii. Students change groups often, depending on their individual needs.</p> <p>iv. The Master Schedule provides opportunity for frequent re-grouping of students based on curriculum content, as well as, student needs and interests.</p>	<p>i. Instructional groups are productive and fully appropriate to the instructional goals of the lesson.</p> <p>ii. Groups change, depending on student progress, experience and individual needs and purposes of their program.</p> <p>iii. Students take the initiative to influence instructional groups to advance their learning.</p>

4. Classroom instruction appropriate to the needs and characteristics of young adolescents killed and knowledgeable teachers (con't).				
Criteria	1	2	3	4
4.h The degree to which teachers exhibit a collaborative relationship and culture	Teachers plan and deliver learning experiences without regard for other content areas.	Teachers occasionally make deliberate interdisciplinary connections and/or collaborate on activities.	Teachers routinely make explicit interdisciplinary connections.	The content areas are integrated so seamlessly that students see and understand the interconnectedness of their learning.
4.i The degree to which teachers use student data, both personal and achievement, to make curricular and instructional decisions	<p>i. Teachers use only teacher-generated numerical data to make curricular and instructional decisions.</p> <p>ii. Accountability data are viewed as lacking usefulness and are disregarded by staff.</p> <p>iii. Curricular and instructional decisions are based on teacher preferences and past practice without reference to any data.</p>	<p>i. Teachers use multiple measures/data sources to make curricular and instructional decisions.</p> <p>ii. Accountability data are understood to be useful, but staff members don't know how to use them or don't know where to begin.</p> <p>iii. Curricular and instructional decisions tend to be based on teacher perception of need, as well as teacher preference and past practice.</p>	<p>i. Teachers use multiple measures/data sources to make curricular and instructional decisions. Instruction is designed to address groups of students' strengths and needs.</p> <p>ii. Accountability data are reviewed and used by teachers to ascertain program strengths and weaknesses.</p> <p>iii. Curricular and instructional decisions tend to be informed by a periodic review of program data.</p>	<p>i. Teachers' curricular and instructional decisions routinely reflect individual student interests, strengths, learning styles, and needs, as determined by the analysis of both personal and achievement data.</p> <p>ii. Multiple sources of data are used by staff on a regular basis to inform both instructional and program decisions.</p>

4. Classroom instruction appropriate to the needs and characteristics of young adolescents killed and knowledgeable teachers (con't).				
Criteria	1	2	3	4
4.j The degree to the school communicates with the parents/guardians and community regarding student achievement	<p>i. There is an assessment process in place. Parents/guardians receive report cards at the end of each marking period. There is no process for conversations with parent/ guardians.</p> <p>ii. A yearly report is given to the community relating to school accountability information.</p>	<p>i. There is an assessment process in place. Parents receive reports cards and teachers communicate with parents/guardians regarding student achievement. Teachers provide opportunities for parent input regarding student progress.</p> <p>ii. School accountability information is discussed only at the faculty level.</p>	<p>i. The assessment process includes reporting student progress over time. Teachers seek parent input relating to student achievement.</p> <p>ii. There is a process for reporting school accountability information to a limited scope of stakeholders.</p>	<p>i. The assessment process includes reporting student progress over time, and teachers make suggestions for home-school collaboration.</p> <p>ii. There is an identifiable process for reporting school accountability information to all stakeholders.</p>

5. Strong educational leadership and a building administration that encourages, facilitates, and sustains involvement, participation, and partnerships.				
Criteria	1	2	3	4
5.a The degree to which the educational leadership and building administration know and understand the Learning Standards and how they interrelate	The educational leadership and building administration operate with a lack of regard for the Standards.	The educational leadership and building administration explicitly promote a limited set of Standards (e.g. ELA, math) and/or promote the Standards with those staff who are "directly responsible" for teaching to them.	The educational leadership and building administration promote the integration of all 28 Learning Standards into other curricular areas.	The educational leadership and building administration promote and advocate the integration of the Standards into other curriculum areas, make reference to the Standards in classroom observation, actively promote cross-curricular reference to the Standards and provides schedules to support such integration.
5.b The degree to which the educational leadership and building administration know and understand the Essential Elements of a standards-focused, high performing middle-level school or middle-level program	The educational leadership and building administration operate with apparent disregard for the Essential Elements.	The educational leadership and building administration share and discuss the Essential Elements with faculty and community but lack implementation strategies.	The educational leadership and building administration are purposefully engaged in implementing the Essential Elements.	The educational leadership and building administration promote a culture that reflects the Essential Elements using them to continually self-assess, monitor progress, and make sound program decisions. The Essential Elements are used to provide a direction for continuous improvement.

5. Strong educational leadership and a building administration that encourages, facilitates,

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and sustains involvement, participation, and partnerships (con't).

Criteria				
5.c The degree to which the educational leadership and building administration have an understanding of the subject matter in the middle grades and of the interconnections of different approaches to student learning and diverse teaching strategies	base of instructional strategies.	recognize that students have different learning styles and seeks to have teachers utilize instructional strategies that are developmentally appropriate.	and building administration use their understanding and appreciation for multiple learning styles to promote research based best practices among teachers.	ii. The educational leadership and building administration lead teachers in the development of lessons and the use of a wide range of research based instructional strategies to meet the learning needs of students.
i. The educational leadership and building administration know about the key concepts and skill areas of all of the curricular areas.	iii. The educational leadership and building administration possess a superficial and limited knowledge base of teaching strategies that are developmentally and cognitively appropriate but cannot match these techniques to students' varied learning styles and intelligences.	iii. The educational leadership and building administration possess a knowledge base of a few teaching strategies that are developmentally and cognitively appropriate and can match these techniques to students' varied learning styles and intelligences on a limited basis.	iii. The educational leadership and building administration possess a strong knowledge base of successful teaching strategies. They can align that understanding with a range of successful research based instructional strategies that are cognitively and developmentally appropriate for meeting the needs of diverse learners.	iii. The educational leadership and building administration possess an extensive knowledge base of successful research based teaching strategies that are developmentally and cognitively appropriate, matching instruction to the students' varied learning styles and intelligences.
ii. The educational leadership and building administration know and can use a limited	i. The educational leadership and building administration understand the key concepts and skill areas of all of the curricular areas.	i. The educational leadership and building administration understand the conceptual connections between and among the various curricular areas.	i. The educational leadership and building administration promote systemic connections between and among the various curricular areas.	
	ii. The educational leadership and building administration	ii. The educational leadership		

5. Strong educational leadership and a building administration that encourages, facilitates, and sustains involvement, participation, and partnerships (con't).				
Criteria	1	2	3	4
5.d The degree to which the educational leadership and building administration involve staff and others in the operation of the school or program, empowering and encouraging them to contribute and to make decisions that benefit students	The educational leadership and building administration provide autonomous leadership.	The educational leadership and building administration accept input on an informal basis from select stakeholders regarding the operation of the school or the organization.	The educational leadership and building administration provide formal opportunities and processes for involvement of multiple stakeholders in decision-making.	The educational leadership and building administration create and foster a professional culture in which all stakeholders are involved in decision-making.
5.e The degree to which the educational leadership and building administration support and encourage teachers to take risks, to explore, to question, to try new instructional approaches, to continue as learners, and to grow	The educational leadership and building administration do not encourage teachers to experiment with new ideas and accept the current practice as the norm.	The educational leadership and building administration direct the changes in instructional strategies resulting in new instructional approaches with may or may not be sustained.	The educational leadership and building administration support and encourage teachers to engage in innovative practices that relate to specific needs or purposes.	The educational leadership and building administration empower teachers to continually engage in innovative practices that meet the needs of their students and school.

6. A network of academic and personal support available for students.				
Criteria	1	2	3	4
6.a The degree to which academic and personal support include opportunities to examine, explore, discuss and understand the changes associated with early adolescence.	Opportunities for students to examine, explore, discuss and understand the changes associated with early adolescence do not exist or are limited to their own understanding, perceptions and experiences.	Opportunities for students to examine, explore, discuss or understand the changes associated with early adolescence are limited to a unit within a course or as a special event.	Opportunities for students to exam, explore, discuss or understand the changes associated with early adolescence are limited to a particular course or the guidance and counseling program.	Multiple and diverse opportunities exist within and across courses and programs for students to examine, explore, discuss and understand the changes associated with early adolescence.
6.b The degree to which academic and personal support include counseling and guidance services to assist students in making life, career, and educational choices.	Counseling and guidance services do not exist or are limited to a single individual.	Counseling and guidance services tend to reflect regulatory or management needs and often are conducted separately from the instructional program.	Counseling and guidance services are connected to the instructional program with planned collaboration among teachers and student support staff.	Counseling and guidance services are integrated in the whole school program with the staff sharing responsibility for the development of all students.

6. A network of academic and personal support available for students (con't).				
Criteria	1	2	3	4
6.c The degree to which academic and personal support includes a network of trained professionals, special programs and community resources available to assist those who have extraordinary needs and require additional services to cope with the changes of early adolescence and/or the academic demands of middle level education	There is no network to meet the needs of the students.	Students receive services from a variety of trained professionals and resources but there is little or no coordination between school-based and community-based agencies.	A network of trained professionals, resources, and services between the school and the community-based agencies provides the necessary services to students needing them in a coordinated fashion.	A network of trained professionals, resources, and services provides the necessary prevention and intervention services to students and their families in a coordinated manner.
6.d The degree to which the support system promotes school/community partnerships and involves members of the community in school activities and initiatives, empowering and encouraging them to contribute and make decisions that benefit students.	There are no partnerships among community organizations and leaders. Every agency that works with the school works independently.	Existing partnerships with community organizations and leaders primary purpose is to provide monetary or material support to the school. These partnerships are often temporary and provide limited opportunity for students to contribute to their community through service learning.	In addition to providing monetary or materials support, some partnerships expand to include student learning and provide opportunities for students to contribute to their community.	A well established, collaborative network of local community organizations and leaders partner with the school to provide monetary or material support, expand student learning experiences and give students opportunities to contribute to the community through service learning, etc.

7. Professional learning and staff development for all staff that are ongoing, planned, purposeful, and collaboratively developed				aboratively developed
Criteria	1	2	3	4
7.a The degree to which the district and staff are committed to providing quality professional development	<p>i. Professional learning opportunities are offered only on Superintendents' conference days.</p> <p>ii. Professional learning opportunities are offered with apparent disregard for any data and subsequent plans, strategies and decisions about professional development are missing.</p>	<p>i. Professional learning opportunities are offered on a very limited basis, other than Superintendents' Conference Day.</p> <p>ii. Professional learning opportunities are based on a single data source and subsequent plans, strategies and decisions about professional development are limited to current trends or fads or are not aligned with what the data reveals.</p>	<p>i. Professional learning opportunities are offered throughout the year.</p> <p>ii. Professional learning opportunities are based on standardized and state test data and subsequent plans, strategies and decisions about professional development are based on the analysis of data.</p>	<p>i. Professional learning opportunities are seamlessly woven into teachers' workdays and embedded in the school program.</p> <p>ii. Professional learning opportunities are grounded in multiple measures of teacher and student data and subsequent plans, strategies and decisions about professional development are based on the analysis of data and the knowledge of the characteristics of young adolescents. These plans are aligned with district, building and department goals.</p>
7.b The degree to which professional learning is individualized and intrinsically motivated.	Individual staff members do not, even when encouraged by school leaders, engage in a program of personalized professional learning.	Individual staff members, when encouraged by school leaders, engage in a program of personalized professional learning.	Individual staff members occasionally engage in self-directed programs of personalized professional learning.	Individual staff members consistently engage in self-directed programs of personalized professional learning.

7. Professional learning and staff development for all staff that are ongoing, planned, purposeful, and collaboratively developed (con't).				
Criteria	1	2	3	4
7.c The degree to which professional development learnings are integrated into classroom practice	Classroom practice is unaffected by professional development.	Classroom practice is minimally and superficially impacted by mandated components of professional development.	Classroom practice reflects individually selected components of professional development.	Classroom practice reflects clear and specific evidence of the language, spirit and content of professional development. This implementation cuts across subjects and grade levels.
7.d The degree to which continuous professional learning is an integral part of the school culture.	<p>i. Professional learning opportunities generally are district based, externally imposed, group oriented, informational in nature, and typically "one-time-only" presentations.</p> <p>ii. Individuals are responsible for their own professional development.</p>	<p>i. Professional learning opportunities generally are district based, group oriented, reflective of that which is of current interest to the educational community, with some staff input, but not an integral part of a school improvement plan.</p> <p>ii. Teachers find their own time to collaboratively reflect, discuss and share strategies and difficulties in implementing new information.</p>	<p>i. Professional learning opportunities generally are school based, initiated by staff based upon perceived school and/or staff needs, individualized, informational and engaging affecting some behavior change and are part of a school improvement plan.</p> <p>ii. Teachers within the same grade level/content area are provided with time to collaboratively reflect, discuss and share strategies and difficulties in implementing new information.</p>	<p>i. Professional learning opportunities generally are school based, initiated by staff based on research and staff needs, individualized, designed to change staff behavior and student learning, and aligned with a long-term plan of continuous improvement.</p> <p>ii. Teachers within the same grade level/ content areas and across grade levels/content areas are provided with ongoing time to collaboratively reflect, discuss and share strategies and difficulties in implementing new information.</p>

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Education:

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M.S. Secondary Social Studies Education, State University of New York College at Cortland,
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C.A.S. Educational Leadership, Syracuse University, 2002, Syracuse, NY

Ed.D. Educational Leadership, Syracuse University, 2015, Syracuse, NY

Honors and Awards:

Principal of NYS Schools To Watch in 2011 & 2014 – NYS Education Department

Vice President of the Cattaraugus Allegany BOCES Superintendent Committee

Section V Athletics Allegany County Superintendent Representative

Association Memberships:

New York State Middle School Association

New York State Council of School Superintendents

Section V Athletic Committee

Rural Schools Association

Facilities and Maintenance CA BOCES Committee

Allegany County Broadband Committee

Regional STEM Deployment Team

Professional Experience:

Superintendent

Fillmore Central School, 104 West Main Street, Fillmore, NY 14735

- Started a teacher team at 7/8 middle school with common planning at grades 7/8
- Developed, planned, and successfully passed a \$9.2 million dollar capital project
- Successfully negotiated contracts for the Fillmore Faculty Association, Fillmore Administrator's Association, CSEA Association, Business Manager
- Working to complete 9.2 million dollar project of the educational facilities at Fillmore School District
- Purchased private property adjacent to the school to be developed into a school parking lot
- Implemented a STEM curriculum across grade levels 3-12
- Coordinated the implementation of I-Ready software learning program for ELA and math across grades prek-8
- Facilitated the implementation of Writer's Workshop and Spiral Math across grades prek-8
- Successful passage of the school budget every year

Principal

Pioneer Central Schools, 12132 Old Olean Road, Yorkshire, NY 14173

- Pioneer Middle School has a total of approximately 780 students, 70 teachers and 110 staff members total across grades 5-8
- Pioneer Middle School was honored as one of the best middle schools in New York State and Nationally when they were recognized as a "Schools to Watch" in 2008
- Pioneer Middle School was re-designated as a New York State and National Schools to Watch in 2011
- Led the implementation of a Response to Intervention Plan in the past year which identifies low level learners, uses data to identify student areas of weakness, prescribes evidence based interventions and increased student reading levels on average by more than one grade level for all participating students
- Facilitated the implementation of a Guided Reading Program in the middle school
- Created a Master Schedule that allowed common planning for all teams and grade levels
- Facilitates a professional learning community through building learning teams with 100% voluntary teacher participation in the middle school
- Coordinated a data driven approach to analyzing benchmark assessments which results in adapting curriculum and instruction to meet individual learner needs
- Worked collaboratively with Superintendent and Business Administrator to identify instructional priorities that have budgetary implications
- Establishes and maintains a positive, collaborative, learning environment that focuses on meeting the social, emotional, academic and intellectual needs of all students

Assistant Principal

East Syracuse-Minoa School District, Minoa, New York

- Assisted in the supervision and discipline of approximately 1,000 students
- Assisted in the evaluation of 80 teachers
- Administered discipline to students in grades 7-9
- Facilitator of Strategic Planning Team which led to transitioning from a building with grades 7-9 to a 6-8 building
- Trained and supported departments to map out curriculum
- Facilitated the implementation of benchmark exams

Social Studies 7 Teacher

East Syracuse-Minoa, 407 Fremont Road, East Syracuse NY 13057

- Social Studies 7 teacher - tenure granted in 3 years
- Facilitator of Strategic Planning Committee
- Created middle school curriculum for Sainte Marie Among The Iroquois Museum
- Advisor for Student Council
- Coach for Varsity Girls Bowling - finished 3rd in the state
- Coach 9th grade boys basketball to undefeated season

Social Studies 9-12 Teacher

OCM Boces, SUNY Cortland, NY 13045

- Social Studies teacher for grades 9-12 - tenure granted in 3 years
- Designed and instructed a life skills class for seniors
- Coordinated community involvement job shadow program
- Advisor to Junior and Senior Class
- Advisor to School Store and Prom Committee